

Birla Central Library

PILANI (Jaipur State)

Class No :- 808.8

Book No :- F604
1941

Accession No :- 12099

808.8 H 67.41

FOLIOS OF NEW WRITING
(III)



*Folios of New Writing will appear at irregular intervals.
All communications should be addressed to John Lehmann at
The Hogarth Press*



FOLIOS OF
NEW WRITING

ere
SPRING
1941

808.8
H67.41

THE HOGARTH PRESS

FIRST PUBLISHED 1941

✓
808.8
F609941
12099
912
C/21
1 8

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
THE GARDEN CITY PRESS LIMITED, AT
LETCHWORTH, HERTFORDSHIRE

FOREWORD

SPRING in the fortress: we do not know to what extent, during the long years of siege, poems were sung, plays acted, stories recited by the people of Troy; but we can risk a guess that they hankered for the arts of peace, and found them all the more precious for the danger outside the walls. March may make warlords feel young and vigorous as they contemplate the slaughter ahead; we must also confess to a certain sense of exhilaration, as the first beleagured Spring advances, at being able to keep alive, in creative writing, a spirit that denies that slaughter.

The Trojans at any rate were worse off in one respect; they could not keep in touch with the poets and story-tellers of distant countries while the enemy's tents were pitched at their gates. The greater part of Europe may be obliterated for us, but we can still print works that have reached us from the English-speaking countries on the other side of the world, from our allies in Greece, and from that great people far away in Asia, our spiritual allies, the Chinese.

Contributions from China have been printed in *New Writing* before from time to time, but on this occasion we have been able to publish not merely stories which have come to us from behind the Chinese lines by devious routes across the world, but also a study of the new literature which is still developing in the middle of the war, by an Englishman who has only recently returned from China. In spite of the many points of natural sympathy between the English and the Chinese, such bridges are badly needed before the modern writers of the two countries can fully understand one another.

This is in keeping with the present policy of *Folios of New Writing*, which is to devote a greater proportion of space to critical studies of general interest. The war has reduced the number of periodicals where such articles can appear, while

FOREWORD

at the same time it has become increasingly important to undertake a reassessment of values and to try to understand what course literature and the arts are taking and what their prospects are for the future. In *Folios of New Writing* we hope to be able to keep open at least a small channel for this work.

Among the articles in this issue are several devoted to the discussion of Virginia Woolf's *The Leaning Tower*, which we published in the Autumn. These were prepared before her tragic death, but we have left them unchanged, believing she would have preferred the argument to go on, with her love of all debates and new ideas. I have only added a few notes in conclusion to serve as an inadequate substitute for the reply she might have made herself.

Spring may bring new assaults and new savageries from without, which may make it increasingly difficult to keep the humanities alive. Yet, while we face outwards, we should not forget the danger within, where the Philistines lurk and have recently been chalking their slogans up on the walls: Spring seems to make the blood gallop in their veins too. Each enemy demands a different technique, an appropriate weapon; bombs may be the best explosive for Panzer Divisions, but perhaps for the Philistines: laughter.

CONTENTS



MR. JONAS	Henry Green	page 11
FOUR POEMS	Laurie Lee	18
<i>THE LEANING TOWER: REPLIES:</i>		
THE FALLING TOWER	Edward Upward	24
BELOW THE TOWER	B. L. Coombes	30
THE TOWER THAT ONCE	Louis MacNeice	37
A POSTSCRIPT	John Lehmann	42
TWO STORIES	Frank Sargeson	47
THREE POEMS	Lawrence Little	53
TWO STORIES	A. H. Teece	57
THREE POEMS FROM A SEQUENCE	Adam Drinan	64
ANNIVERSARY	Odysseus Elytis	68
POEM	Pantelis Prevelakis	70
TWO POEMS	Donald Bain	71
PENSION BELLEVUE	Jean Howard	75
FOUR POEMS	Maurice James Craig	84
MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH	Donagh MacDonagh	87
<i>IN CHINA:</i>		
SMALL TALK IN CHINA	Harold Acton	98
MR. HUA WEI	Chang T'ien-Yi	113
HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT	Yao Hsüeh-Yin	122
AUNT GERTRUDE	V. S. Pritchett	135
TWO POEMS	Louis MacNeice	147
AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES	Walter Allen	149

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



HENRY GREEN was born thirty-seven years ago. He left Oxford before taking a degree, in order to work in a factory in Birmingham. He is the author of three novels, including *Living and Party Going*, and a self-portrait, *Pack My Bag*. He has been serving with the A.F.S. in London since the beginning of the war.

LAURIE LEE was born in the Cotswolds twenty-six years ago. He spent some time wandering round Spain with a fiddle. Since he returned, he has had a number of jobs, and has begun to publish his poems in various magazines.

EDWARD UPWARD, schoolmaster, novelist and critic, is best known for his novel *Journey to the Border*, part of which was originally published in *NEW WRITING*.

B. L. COOMBES, son of a small farmer in Herefordshire, has worked nearly all his life in the mines of South Wales. His autobiography, *These Poor Hands*, was published early in 1939.

LOUIS MACNEICE, poet, critic and translator, was born in 1907 in Belfast. He has recently returned from America and his latest book is a study of W. B. Yeats.

FRANK SARGESON is a New Zealand writer who has begun to attract much attention in recent years, both here and in America. He lives in Auckland.

LAWRENCE LITTLE is just twenty, and lived the early part of his life mostly in London. At present he is working in Civil Building Control in Newcastle.

A. H. TEECE was born in 1920 at Darlaston in the Black Country, where he has continued to live. He recently began to publish his work in *The Mermaid*, the student magazine of the University of Birmingham.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

ADAM DRINAN was born in the Isle of Skye, and educated partly in Scotland and partly in England. He was an actor for a short time, and has worked on the land in East Anglia. He is at present living in Cornwall.

ODYSSEUS ELYTIS is the pseudonym of a young Greek poet who was living in Athens up to the outbreak of the Greek War. Five or six years ago he published his first poems in the *Nea Grammata*, and was at once recognized as one of the most promising poets of his generation.

PANTELIS PREVELAKIS is a Greek writer who comes from Crete. He studied in Paris and he knows Spain well. Two years ago he published *Chronicle of a Town*, which is considered a masterpiece in his country; he followed it with a collection of poems, *The Naked Poetry*.

DONALD BAIN was born in Liverpool in 1922, and is at present a student at Cambridge. These are the first poems he has had published, with the exception of one when he was fifteen years old.

JEAN HOWARD was born in 1913 and married at the age of twenty-one. Since the war she has been living in the country with her children: her husband is in the Army. The story printed here is the first she has had published.

MAURICE CRAIG was born in Ireland in 1919. He has published poetry in various magazines, and was represented in *Cambridge Poetry* 1940.

DONAGH MACDONAGH is twenty-eight years old, and his second book of poetry, *Veterans and Other Poems*, was published this year by the Cuala Press, Dublin. He is a barrister, and broadcasts weekly from Radio Eireann. His father was a signatory of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic.

HAROLD ACTON was born in Florence in 1904 and educated at Eton and Oxford. He has travelled widely, and lived for many years in Pekin at the National University there. He has published several works of poetry and fiction and also translations of Chinese poems, plays and stories.

CHANG T'IENT-YI was born in 1907 and is a native of

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Hunan province. He has worked as a clerk, army amanuensis, reporter, school-teacher, government official, and farmer. He is one of the most prolific of modern Chinese writers, and since the Sino-Japanese War he has been engaged in official educational work in Hunan.

YAO HSÜEH-YIN is in his early twenties, and is a native of Honan province. When war broke out he gave up school-teaching and joined the partisans as a political worker. Chinese critics consider the story printed here the best that has come out of the war.

V. S. PRITCHETT is the well-known critic and story-writer, who left school at the age of sixteen during the last war, and first earned his living in the leather and photography businesses. He turned to writing at the age of twenty-three.

WALTER ALLEN, novelist, was born in 1911 at Aston, Birmingham, and was educated at local elementary schools, King Edward's and Birmingham University. His published works include *Innocence is Drowned* and *Blind Man's Ditch*, as well as a number of short stories in various magazines.

JOHN LEHMANN was born in 1907 in the Thames Valley. He lived for some years in Central Europe, working as a free-lance journalist.

HENRY GREEN

MR. JONAS

ABOVE us, in the night, as we drew up, in the barrage, the sky, from street level, seemed to be one vast corridor down which, with the speed of light, blue double wooden doors as vast were being slammed in turn. From outside the fire station, at which we were waiting to be ordered on to a particular address, that is to the next blaze on the list, we could see three fires, one of which was unattended yet.

The raid was in full swing. Already it would have been possible to read in the reddish light spread by a tall building sixty yards away, the top floors of which, with abandon, in recklessness, with fierce acceptance had exchanged their rectangles for tiger-striped hoops, great wind-blown orange pennants, huge yellow cobra tongues of flame. Three thin, uncoloured, plumes of water were being played on to the conflagration by firemen in the street. The extremities of these jets were broken into zigzags, moving up and down as the force of gravity overcame the initial pressure at the nozzle. This gave the effect of three flags of water rippling in a breeze. The plumes, when all pressure was spent, dipped weakly to those flames in a spatter of drops. It was as though three high fountains which, through sunlight, would furl their flags in rainbows as they fell dispersed, had now played these up into a howling wind to be driven, to be shattered, dispersed, no longer to fall to sweet rainbows, but into a cloud of steam rose-coloured beneath, above no wide water-lilies in a pool, but into the welter of yellow banner-streaming flames.

Accustomed, as all were, to sights of this kind, there was not one amongst us who did not now feel withdrawn into himself, as though he had come upon a place foreign to him but which he was aware he had to visit, as if it were a region

MR. JONAS

the conditions in which he knew would be something between living and dying, not, that is, a web of dreams, but rather such a frontier of hopes or mostly fears as it may be in the destiny of each, or almost all, to find, betwixt coma and the giving up of living.

Violence was there in so strange a shape as to appear a lamb, and danger also, but, in the extravagance by which this was displayed, it seemed no more than a rather deadly warmth we could feel, and which, at the distance, was all that remained of that heat, which turned those fountains into steam.

The breaking pattern of rings which rain, lost in colour, can form on the surface of water, was no more likely than this other, blasted white into clouds. But the black goldfish, gulping at the drops, were more conscious than firemen, unafraid, seated hands on knees, silent beneath that awful, the wide magnificence of that sight.

Not many minutes had gone by before one of our crew had criticized the way in which these three jets were being played, so far below the fire that there was no force left behind them. He said they should have been taken to a neighbouring roof from which they could be directed down in a torrent into the flames. He pointed. Looking up again, we saw the writhing mass, the pointed tongues had leapt still higher, huge sparks now flew out in showers and there was more black smoke than steam. This, as it rolled away, was coloured on the under side a darker red, the purple of a fire momentarily beyond control.

More pumps drew up. Those who manned them began, in the half dark, to look about for friends. Then, from out of the fire station, some five or six came trotting. These were the number ones, those in charge of each unit, coming back to their pumps with the address to which each had been ordered. Not able to distinguish crews quickly in this light they were calling out the numbers of their own sub-stations. It was hard to realize all the noise which was made by those pumps already at work, the roaring of the fire, and that

HENRY GREEN

continuous battering up above until we had noticed how difficult it was for these men to make themselves heard, shouting, as they passed, into the backs of the tenders.

When he found us our man shouted the address, then climbed in front with the driver. As we drove off, we asked each other which street he had named, but no one behind had heard. And taking, as we did, the first turn to the left, then right, we were far enough from the blaze to lose all sight of it. We did not know where we might be. We had drawn up no more than ninety yards away, but the only sign of what we had left was in the pink roofs of an office building opposite, glowing in the reflection. The noise was so much less.

We had come to a very different problem.

There was almost quietness as we got down. It was very dark. All I could see was a thick mass of smoke or steam, it was impossible to tell one from the other, surging heavy from a narrow passage. We were told to run hose out, up this alley. One man took a length, snapped the coupling in, laid out the fifty foot and went back for more, while another snapped his coupling in where the first had ended, went on, and, while he in his turn was back to get a second length, yet another went on from where the second had finished. The hose was laid without the men taking in their surroundings.

Some living things turn to the light, we went by instinct into the deepest dark. I hurried, stumbled, into this pall of smoke and steam, when suddenly, after my boots had crunched on grit, I came to the debris.

What I saw, a pile of wreckage like vast blocks of slate, the slabs of wet masonry piled high across this passage, was hidden by a fresh cloud of steam and smoke, warm, limitless dirty cotton wool, disabling in that it tight bandaged the eyes. Each billow, and steam rolls unevenly in air, islanding a man in the way that he can, to others, be isolated asleep in blankets. Nor did the light of a torch do more than make my sudden blindness visible to me in a white shine below the waist. There was nothing for it but to go on towards

MR. JONAS

voices out in front, but climbing, slipping up, while unrolling the hose, I felt that I was not a participant, that all this must have been imagined, until, in another instant, a puff of wind, perhaps something in the wreckage which was alight below the surface, left me out in the clear as though in, and among, the wet indigo reflecting planes of shattered tombs deep in a tumulus the men coughing ahead had just finished blasting.

It was impossible to work fast. The number one was shouting for that last connection, into which he could snap the nozzle, long before we could get it to him. In the struggle, with the directions we yelled at each other, the scene came real again. But when everything was laid out, and word had been sent back to turn the water on, a vault quiet fell once more as we stood waiting in smoke which came by waves, hot, acrid, making the eyes run, and bringing on a cough that hurt the lungs.

Water is never got quickly, perhaps because it seems so long to wait before the fire. This I could not see yet from the place I had reached, on top of the wreckage, beyond the steam at last but into smoke, and, as I could now realize in the intervals of sight, on a mass of rubble about fifteen foot up from the roadway. Below, to my left, a Rescue Squad was silently getting into the escape shaft of a basement shelter, climbing one by one into the earth, as it might be into the lower chamber of a tomb. On my right, the steam, which had bothered us as we climbed, was still belching out. There must have been a gas main alight beneath the debris for whitish yellow flames were coming out, as I could now see five yards away round a great corner, in darker blue, of sculptured coping stone, curved in an arc up which this yard-high maple leaf of flame came flaring, veined in violet, then died, then flared again.

In the quiet, I could not believe. The guns had given up firing. There were no aeroplanes. Another few moments drowned in smoke and then I could make out, forward, a concentration of torches in an archway five foot above where

HENRY GREEN

I stood, in what might have been a door when the ruins had been an office building, and figures that moved, but were too flat, too indistinct to seem real. I was wringing wet with sweat. At that minute there was absolute silence. I struggled closer. Broken gas pipes caught at my rubber boots, wires at my helmet, jagged spars of wood lunged at my flanks, and, at my lungs writhed briars of smoke. I heard a man steadily coughing. Then I could see the top of him. He was sitting in that archway, in battledress I thought, a mug between his hands, and coughing, coughing. In everything but sound it was too vague. He seemed, by the light of the torch on his belt, to be sitting on a taut sheet of steam.

The number one took it into his head I had a message from the pump. He wanted to know about the water, why it still had not come. We both had a fit of coughing. When he could, he told me the Rescue people had a man in under there, pointing to where the smoke was a rising wall. I was sure the individual sitting on his sheet, still coughing hopelessly, on and on, while every now and then he retched, was someone who had been brought out. Then he spoke. With difficulty he said they would have to have oxygen breathing apparatus, that it was too thick without. I realized that he must be the leader. Again he began to cough. My number one went back to order on the oxygen. Taking his place, I came up to another member of our crew. He told me, between his spasms, that this man was trapped at the bottom of a small jagged hole at our feet, and that before the Rescue Squad had been driven out, they had just been able to see him.

There was a shout of 'water' behind, the hose kicked once or twice and then jumped tight, the jet sprang out solid, white. The leader got up. He stood. His legs were still hidden but I could now see they were in steam which was drawn in by the draught of the doorway, steam running compactly like a swollen brook. He said, 'not too near or you'll drown him, he's just below you there, play it over here against this wall, the fire's creeping along from behind.'

MR. JONAS

Come on, he's alive.' We played the water where he said and then were blotted out immediately in more than night, a forgetting, a death of black, the thick smoke, it let no air in, of a fire smacked out below, but which, we knew, would be up again if we did not almost flood it. 'By Christ, you'll drown him,' he shouted. But we judged, at the depth that man must be lying, that we should get more steam and smoke than he would get water. Now everything became too real in our fight for breath, too solid in the heavy river pressing without weight, in the enemy that seeks out to weaken, to dam life out from the source.

When we had had enough we raised the nozzle. We played our jet farther away. In under a minute we were breathing air, a little more and the leader was visible again, attended by three others. Smoke is in a hurry to get away, all we had to contend with now was steam, the smoke was whirling off that wreckage and coming back above our heads, we were clear. He asked us to keep our water still farther off while he got down to find out if he could still hear the man below. It was plain he did not think that he would get an answer. He got into the hole and the smoke. He disappeared, it was deeper than I had thought. His companions crowded round, shining their torches down on the rising well of smoke and steam. He called out, incongruously, 'Can you hear me, Mr. Jonas?' We waited.

'He's all right,' he called back to us, 'but we've got to be quick.' The others climbed half-way down. The torches made it seem as though these men were fighting, half drowned, against a source of water, the smoke came up so solid there.

They began handing back single pieces of wreckage to others by me whom I had not seen come up, bits of wood, slats, part of a chair. They talked about where to shine their torches. They were all coughing again. They worked in silence for some time. Then the leader said 'here, here.' Then he said, 'careful now, up here.' Then he said 'towards that light.' Another man said 'a bit to the left, take it easy,'

HENRY GREEN

and I saw a bald head, then khaki shoulders. He was not coughing. He was getting up alone. Then I saw he was smothered in dust. He was bone dry. It was Mr. Jonas. As he came up and out, almost without assistance, we all began talking to him, telling him where to tread. He said absolutely nothing. He climbed right into that archway and disappeared. Coughing, the Rescue men climbed out. They thanked us. There were no more victims below. They also went out through the arch by which we could hear, but not see, others getting Mr. Jonas off. Then we were alone.

Then the firing began again overhead. And then we settled down to the next four hours we reckoned it would take us to put the fire out, or, if not to extinguish it, to leave the job in such a state that it would not break out before we could be relieved. But in spite of anything we could do it spread. In half an hour the deep corner, out of which they had got this man, was a mass of flames. By morning forty pumps were on the job. After twelve hours we were relieved, at half-past nine in the morning. When the other crew took over we had fought our way back to exactly the same spot above that hole out of which, unassisted once he had been released, out of unreality into something temporarily worse, apparently unhurt, but now in all probability suffering from shock, had risen, to live again whoever he might be, this Mr. Jonas.

LAURIE LEE

FOUR POEMS

I

Oh, larch tree with scarlet berries
sharpen the morning slender sun
sharpen the thin taste of September
with your aroma of sweet wax and powder delicate.

Fruit is falling in the valley
breaking on the snouts of foxes
breaking on the wooden crosses
where children bury the shattered bird.

Fruit is falling in the city
blowing a woman's eyes and fingers
across the street among the bones
of boys who could not speak their love.

I watch a starling cut the sky
a dagger through the blood of cold,
and grasses bound by strings of wind
stockade the sobbing fruit among the bees.

Oh, larch tree, with icy hair
your needles thread the thoughts of snow
while in the fields a shivering girl
takes to her breasts the sad ripe apples.

LAURIE LEE

II

JUNIPER holds to the moon
a girl adoring a bracelet;
as the hills draw up their knees
they throw off their jasmine girdles.

You are a forest of game,
a thought of nights in procession,
you tread through the bitter fires
of the nasturtium.

I decorate you to a smell of apples,
I divide you among the voices
of owls and cavaliering cocks
and woodpigeons monotonously dry.

I hang lanterns on your mouth
and candles from your passionate crucifix,
and bloody leaves of the virginia
drip with their scarlet oil.

There is a pike in the lake
whose blue teeth eat the midnight stars
piercing the water's velvet skin
and puncturing your sleep.

I am the pike in your breast,
my eyes of clay revolve the waves
while cirrus roots and lilies grow
between our banks of steep embraces.

FOUR POEMS

III

Look into wombs and factories and behold
nativities unblessed by hopeful stars,
the sleek machine of flesh,
the chubby bomb,
lying together in one dreadful cradle.

We are no longer ignored
in this easy agony of creation;
kings mark our breathing with a cross
and grant us honour undesired,
our vulnerability knows the trick of slaughter,
our pulse the useful trump of death.

This world, this comfortable meadow,
gay with surprise and treasure,
is common now with harvests of despair;
and mouths eager to sing,
to taste the many flowers of love,
open to tongues of bullets
and moan their shattered palates on the ground.

IV

Out through the numbered doorway of the years,
defiled and stepped in oils of death,
he sees the lovely season pass
leaving a haunted valley in his bed.

He took with lust the pollen from her lips,
consumed in sleep her fatal grace,
while cries and histories of blood
burned through the cities in the sun.

LAURIE LEE

Across her skies spread out for love
he saw black slaughter shoot its tongue,
he saw the mourners stop their eyes
and crouch among her noisy flowers.

Now staring on the rock of snow
with leaves like prizes still held in his hand,
he hears the devils chattering in the ice
and cannot wish to see another spring.

THE LEANING TOWER : REPLIES



EDWARD UPWARD

THE FALLING TOWER

VIRGINIA WOOLF sees the younger writers of the 1925-39 period as 'dwellers in two worlds, one dying, the other struggling to be born.' She accuses them of confusion and compromise. There is truth in her accusation, but the most significant thing about it is the angle from which it is made. She sees these writers from the standpoint of the dying world, a standpoint which gives her a distorted view of them. Their merits—not least of which were their hostility to the dying world and their sympathy for the world struggling to be born—appear to her as faults, and one of their faults—their tendency to analyse themselves 'with help from Dr. Freud'—appears to her as their only merit.

She states that their writings are filled with bitterness against bourgeois society, and she points to this as a fault. Why is it a fault? Perhaps because she considers that bourgeois society deserves a more lenient treatment. But this is not the reason she gives. She criticises these writers for what she assumes to be their private motives rather than for writing untruths about the bourgeoisie. She suggests that their bitterness is due to a sense of guilt: they are aware that their middle-class position in society offers them 'a very fine view and some sort of security,' and at the same time they feel that it is 'wrong' for them to enjoy privileges which 'other people pay for'; but they wish to cling to their privileges, and they therefore write violently against other bourgeois persons, such as retired admirals and armament manufacturers, in order to distract attention from their own wrongdoing. If she is right about their motives these writers were indeed very stupid people. But in fact few of them were so shortsighted as to imagine that the view from their 'leaning tower'—a view that showed surroundings

EDWARD UPWARD

of poverty, unemployment and approaching world war—was a very fine one, and few were so insensitive as to believe that their position on the leaning tower—‘falling tower’ would have been a better description—was anything but insecure. However, let the biographer and the psychologist regard their motives as of primary importance. In their private lives they may or may not have been futile, objectionable persons: the literary critic will be more interested in establishing the truthfulness or untruthfulness of what they wrote.

If bourgeois society is in reality admirable or at least harmless then the attitude of these writers towards it is a fault—a fault serious enough to outweigh and to vitiate any merits they may have had. No writer, however skilful, can be a good writer if the picture of life he presents is basically untrue. But bourgeois society is neither admirable nor harmless. Its two world wars within twenty-five years and its world economic slump of 1929-33 cannot be regarded as irrelevant trifles. Bourgeois society has passed its prime, is reactionary and destructive and has little to offer to the vast majority of human beings except suffering and death. This is a fact, not a political theory. The writers whom Virginia Woolf attacks, were, in a greater or less degree, aware of this fact, and they ought to be praised rather than condemned for attempting to write about it. They are better writers than they would have been if they had evaded it or denied it. (Virginia Woolf will no doubt disagree. One passage in her paper seems to imply that the best modern writers are those who have remained immune to the ‘influence’ of the major social realities of our time. Which writers she means is not quite clear.)

Some critics may argue that bitterness, no matter what its object, is in itself an emotion which makes good writing impossible. There is a hint in Virginia Woolf’s paper that she holds this view. Yet the *Inferno* of Dante and the tragedies of Shakespeare are certainly not free from bitterness and discord. The great imaginative works of the past in

THE FALLING TOWER

which these qualities have played an unimportant part—for example, *Don Quixote* and *The Canterbury Tales*—have been few. To criticise the younger writers of the 1925-39 period on the ground that their work is filled with bitterness and discord is as absurd as to criticise them for writing poems which cannot easily be ‘listened’ to ‘when we are alone’ (she might as well condemn all poetic drama from Aeschylus onwards) or to criticise them because ‘they must teach, they must preach’ (the Hebrew prophets, Dante, Milton, even Wordsworth might be regarded as offenders in this respect; possibly she does so regard them).

There is room in imaginative literature both for bitterness and for good-humour, for vehement ‘preaching’ and for tranquil contemplation, for discord and for harmony. Only the parochially-minded critic who cannot see beyond the literary fashions of his own time will rule out any one of these qualities as absolutely impermissible. A writer’s emotional attitude cannot, any more than his style, be criticised in isolation from the material with which he deals. And to demand that a modern writer should not deal directly or indirectly with bourgeois society would be tantamount to demanding that he should not live in bourgeois society.

The fact that a writer bitterly attacks present-day society is not enough to prevent him from creating ‘great’ literature. Whereas a writer who praises present-day society is more than likely to be a very bad writer. If the ‘thirties had produced a great poet or a great novelist he would almost certainly have been one whose writing showed strong hostility towards the old world and passionate sympathy for the world struggling to be born. Yet it is doubtful whether any of the ‘leaning tower’ writers, in spite of their hostility towards the old and their sympathy for the new, can be called ‘great.’ There is some truth in Virginia Woolf’s accusation that they were half-hearted and that their work was filled with confusion and compromise. They attacked bourgeois society but they tended to direct their

EDWARD UPWARD

attacks mainly against its more trivial evils and against its minor representatives. They sympathised with the struggle to create a socialist society but they had their misgivings about this struggle. At times they seemed afraid to hate and afraid to love. Their experience of bourgeois hate and of bourgeois love made them distrustful also of socialist hate and love. Consequently very few 'heroes' or 'villains' of any stature appear in their writings. Auden holds up for our disapproval Miss Gee, the repressed church-worker who dies of cancer of the breast. A socialist writer would have preferred to attack a more important person, an archbishop for example or an imperialist politician, and would have viewed him less inhumanely even if with far stronger disapproval—since in the last analysis the socialist blames not individuals but the conditions which have made them what they are. A socialist writer would be likely to choose as his 'hero' a character of historic proportions, but the writers of the 'thirties tended to choose as their heroes either very ordinary people or else frustrated intellectuals or even criminals. They could not really admire their heroes. And in their search for someone or something to admire they fell into philosophical abstractions and psychological obscurities. Their writings sometimes show a lack of common human feeling and of the fundamental simplicity that never was paucity. This is a fault which is not to be found in the great imaginative writers of the past.

The writers of the 'thirties rejected the bourgeois outlook on life. Why were they unable wholeheartedly to adopt the socialist outlook? Virginia Woolf explains that unless they were prepared to cease writing altogether they could not afford to throw away their bourgeois education and their inherited money. But there was no need for them to 'throw away' either their education or their money or to go and earn their living 'in a mine or a factory.' Such behaviour might accord with bourgeois conceptions of saintliness, but from a socialist point of view saints are useless people. One does not cease to be a member of bourgeois

THE FALLING TOWER

society by becoming a worker in a bourgeois-owned factory. What they could and should have done was to use their education (or at least those parts of it which had any value) and their money (if they had any) to help the struggle for a socialist society. Marx and Lenin did not throw away their bourgeois education, nor did Engels throw away his bourgeois money. On the contrary they made proper use—the only proper use—of these advantages. This is not to suggest that the writers of the 'thirties ought to have abandoned imaginative for political writing. One does not help socialism by refusing to make use of one's best talents. A first-rate imaginative writer who views the world from a socialist standpoint can be of very great help to the struggle for socialism—as Gorki showed in Russia. (Moreover he is likely to produce better literature than a writer of equal ability who believes that writing is more important than life and that it ought not to 'help' or be subordinated to anything in life). The difficulties which hindered the writers of the 'thirties from adopting a completely socialist outlook were not insurmountable. It is true that in order to write like socialists they would have had to *be* socialists and to work with other socialists, but this does not mean that they would have had to spend all their time in committee meetings or in door-to-door canvassing or in composing propaganda leaflets. They could have taken part in ordinary political work and they could have written poems and novels as well. Their inherited money gave them—or those of them who possessed inherited money—the time and the freedom both for political work and for imaginative writing. But socialist activity, even in the 'thirties and even for those socialists who did not fight in Spain, was neither easy nor comfortable. The younger writers who did become active undoubtedly found that they had less energy to spare for imaginative writing. Others who had been at one period strongly attracted to socialism were deterred from activity by this example. And their hesitation was increased by the fact that their economic position enabled them, temporarily

EDWARD UPWARD

at least, to devote most of their energy to writing. Their tower had not yet fallen; and there was just a possibility, they may have felt, that it would not fall for some time.

But the time is very near now when the tower of middle-class leisure and of middle-class freedom will fall to the ground and will be smashed for ever. The alternative before writers will no longer be between bourgeois comfort and socialist hardship. Whether they become socialists or not they will have to live hard lives. Some of them will find the conditions too difficult and will give up writing altogether. Others will persist. And those who become active socialists and who persist in writing may be able to produce far better work than before. Many of the 'leaning tower' writers have already, in the 'twenties and the 'thirties, produced good work. There is much in the poetry of Auden and of Spender which is fit to stand beside the great poetry of the past. The 'leaning tower' writers are abler and more serious than most of their detractors. No better work than theirs appeared in England in the 'thirties. They may produce their best work in the 'forties.

B. L. COOMBES

BELOW THE TOWER

VIRGINIA WOOLF is one of the foremost writers in the world; her reputation is that of a sincere and able thinker; so I found a deal of pleasure by reading what she has to say about writers, their training, and the happenings which influence their outlook.

She says that a writer looks at human life and thus gains his material. That is true, but here comes our division—in what way does he look at human life? from what distance does he look? and how much of their lives do the people in view allow him to see?

I think the answer to those questions will show why I must disagree with some of the points made in 'The Leaning Tower.' Virginia Woolf places human life in six social classes of which the two lowest are the working class and 'that great class which is called simply and comprehensively "The Poor." ' Being myself of the working class I claim there is no margin between the two.

I know the professional class works and so does the commercial class, but I am following the lead given by Virginia Woolf when she places the working class on its own. I assume she means those who do manual labour; who soil their hands and their clothes; and are supposed—quite falsely—to have no need of skill in their work. I disagree with this separation because I think that manual workers and the poor are in the same class. I know that the loss of one week's work through illness, injury, or unemployment will force most of my mates to visit the relieving officer—with no enthusiasm on either side. Should anything go wrong with next week's wages many of them would be destitute. Every Thursday I see a queue forming to wait for parish relief; when the collieries work slack time that line of waiting

B. L. COOMBES

men is very much longer. How would they be classed?—as working class one week and poor the next?

Under the present system they are all in one class, the Poor; and above them, on the Leaning Tower that Virginia Woolf depicts, are the writers from the other classes looking down with an interest that is sharpened by the fear that if ever their tower should collapse they will have to join the crowd below and so may get their clothes soiled or their toes trodden on. Yet there is a livelier movement to be seen below the tower and a muttering that cannot be ignored. The world is racing towards new ideas and new methods. The leaders in thought have sensed it; so have the political experts. They have begun to realise how great the gap is that exists between themselves and the lives, the thoughts, and the ideas of the mass of people; and also how greatly their future may depend on the way that mass of people feels and behaves.

Now, I am sure that if Virginia Woolf should visit this mining area in which I live, she would be taken into the parlour—if the family was fortunate to have one—and the behaviour of the adults as well as the play of the children would be restrained to the soberness of a Sunday afternoon; but if I went to that same house I would be invited into the kitchen where the play of the children or the discussion of the problems concerning work and living would continue without any pause—probably they would be stimulated by my help.

Similarly, if I walked into a public-house there would not be the least slackening in the debates; but if a visiting journalist were to do so the talkers would probably become keenly interested in the weather. There is a sound reason for these attitudes of suspicion and I, who have lived all my years amongst this class of people, know they have good cause to be wary.

Yet, if we are to survive, we must bridge this gap and the solution that appeals most to me is the worker who is also a writer. He is almost the only one who can connect both

BELOW THE TOWER

sides and I feel he should be encouraged because, for good or evil, he is going to play a most important role in the future of our lives and our literature.

Quoting the 'Leaning Tower': 'Take away all that the working class has given to English literature and that literature would scarcely suffer; take away all that the educated class has given, and English literature would scarcely exist.'

That is correct, but working class writing has not yet become strong on its feet and for the most part is still like an alarmed infant, whimpering at finding itself in strange company and fearing that it may be cuffed before being sent back to its home. Besides, admitting the excellence of a deal of middle-class writing, I know that much has been published which is not good, as it is still possible in this country for money and influence to ensure that a mediocre book will be printed.

It is also true that a great proportion of the working class have no facility in either reading or writing, as yet, and none of them have much money or influence. If one moves about in their homes it is surprising how few can write a decent letter; even in this war we are told of the many classes started to learn soldiers how to read and write. Watch a Trade Union secretary at his job and note how he has to help his members.

I wonder can any of the Leaning Tower writers conceive the terrific struggle a man of the working class must put up before he can 'get through' as a writer? It seems that every door is shut against him, that he has set himself a most hopeless task, and that writing must be in every pulse of his being if he can survive and express himself at last.

Again: 'In 1930 young men at college were forced to be aware of what was happening in Russia; in Germany; in Italy; in Spain.' They were late in that learning, possibly because they lived outside the strong currents of life and it seems that they are again slow in realizing what 1940 has brought to this land. Down in my valley we feel that the class trained to govern has failed here as it did abroad;

B. L. COOMBES

British workers are becoming aware that they are almost alone in their worship of the family crest. Tradition has held its place long in this country but its power is failing fast—in many cases it has been betrayed and shamed by the ones it fostered.

‘The tower they realized was founded upon injustice and tyranny; it was wrong for a small class to possess an education that the other people paid for . . . It was wrong; yet how could they make it right?’ Below the tower the people had also decided that it was unfair and wrong but the answer seems very simple to them. A thing founded on injustice and tyranny must be abolished and education—as well as opportunity—made free and equal for all.

Again: ‘Their education must not be thrown away; as for their capital—did Dickens, did Tolstoy ever throw away their capital? Did D. H. Lawrence, a miner’s son, continue to live like a miner? No; for it is death for a writer to throw away his capital; to be forced to earn his living in a mine or factory.’

Their education—is there any need to throw it away even if that was possible, which I dispute? Would it not be valuable in the service of their fellows and in some endeavour to repay those who have made that education possible? The assumption that one must be above and superior—that must be thrown away. This question of education—I know that the Leaning Tower writer starts with a tremendous advantage over us because he has been taught the use of words and the beauty of language and has been trained in the ways of great writers and the manner of getting the right effect. In comparison we are crude and clumsy because our life has made us so, and having no guide we grope into the darkness—often taking the wrong road. Yet I feel we have some advantages because the material for our shaping is very close to our hands. Will an expensive education help a writer to see what goes on in the pits half a mile below the ground where nearly a million of our people spend one-third of their lives? I refer to miners because I am one and

BELOW THE TOWER

because George Orwell—another middle-class writer—in his book *The Road to Wigan Pier*, says ‘More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and so remote from our experiences, so invisible. . . .’

Then, what is a writer’s capital? It is not all his experiences; his environment; his knowledge of human life and how people live and aspire, love and desire, hate and die? One must learn to select, to create character that convinces, and to use every book or article that helps our craft; but we do add very greatly to our capital by living amongst the people of our kind, trying to let the world know how they live. Here I feel that worker writers have their one great advantage—they are in the ant-heap and do not view it from a distance.

Virginia Woolf mentions D. H. Lawrence; he was the son of a miner but, as I understand the term, he never became a miner. He was educated at University College, Nottingham, then became a school teacher, so why choose this unfair example? I feel that Lawrence did throw away his capital and the chance of adding to it. Had he remained with his people, and the miners, he might have become a far greater writer. Had he stayed below the Tower instead of scrambling up it he would have done more good for mankind. To me he is a man who was greatly gifted, but had not the will to use his power in the best way.

It may be death for a middle-class writer to work in a mine or factory—in a writing sense, of course—because it would mean conditions that repel him and a way of living and working that would upset all his ideas. It is just as surely the creative end of a working class writer if he leaves his own sphere; he has grown into it and the labour is part of his being. If one accepts the statement by Virginia Woolf as it is written it means that no one who works at manual labour can ever hope to be a writer. She may not have thought of it that way but the result must be so. What else can it be?

B. L. COOMBES

Very few workers can put the thoughts and lives of their fellows into words and for them recognition must be slow. There are months of study to be faced ; continual practice in the use of words to be maintained; and every day the lack of privacy or quiet, and the exhaustion of heavy work—work for the pay envelope—must be borne. I put it fairly, so I think, if I claim that such a man would be lucky if he had any degree of recognition as a writer under five or ten years. I am writing from experience, knowing I have been unusually lucky. How then could he live during that period of training ? There is at present no obvious method of subsidy; he has no choice but to continue at his manual work and write as he can and when he can. And yet this disadvantage can also be an advantage, for the Leaning Tower writer will lack the closeness of men who live and work together; who eat the same food at the same time, and who speak the same language.

One thing I regret when reading the stories of working-class writers. It seems that the struggle has made them grim and that their characters have either a perpetual snarl or a whine. That is not true to life, for even in the hardest conditions and heaviest work there is always humour flashing out. We have found things to laugh over when shut in—for ever it seemed—by a huge fall. Children still chuckle, birds sing, and sometimes flowers will bloom around the poorest homes. I enjoy my job and I want to stay with it for I find things that are interesting around me every day. I am an adventurer in literature, but my step is getting firm and my hand is quite strong, yet I feel that many have turned back who would have been good companions had they been helped more quickly.

I feel that we on our side have a great need for the Leaning Tower writers if they will come a little nearer. I know they can teach me much that is necessary and good. I would like to learn from them. Very probably I could tell them of things that they have never seen and they should benefit by that telling. Let me explain it in a musical way as I am

BELOW THE TOWER

a musician. I have trained myself into a capable instrumentalist and can sit alongside a professional violinist, keeping note perfect while he plays a difficult selection at sight. I love music and have sacrificed a great deal to learn it, yet a symphony concert does not inspire me. I know it is because I have not been properly trained to the beauty of great music. It is the same with the classics of literature. I know they should be enjoyed yet I cannot get the full flavour. I want those from the Leaning Tower to come down and teach me what I lack.

LOUIS MACNEICE

THE TOWER THAT ONCE

Mrs. WOOLF, in her article *The Leaning Tower*, looks forward to a classless society which will give to writers 'a mind no longer crippled, evasive, divided. They may inherit that unconsciousness which . . . is necessary if writers are to get beneath the surface, and to write something that people remember when they are alone' With this general aim or hope I sympathize. 'Literature,' I would agree with her, 'is no one's private ground.' I find it, therefore, both inconsistent and unjust that she should dismiss not only so lightly, but so acidly—as 'the embittered and futile tribe of scapegoat hunters'—that group of younger writers who during the Thirties made it their business to stigmatize those all too present evils which Mrs. Woolf herself considers evil and to open those doors which she herself wants opened. She seems to understand these junior colleagues of hers no better than Yeats understood Eliot. This mutual misunderstanding of the literary generations is one of the evils of our times; my own generation has too often been unjust to its immediate predecessors.

Mrs. Woolf's literary history is over-simplified. She writes of the social divisions of the nineteenth century : 'the nineteenth-century writer did not seek to change those divisions; he accepted them. He accepted them so completely that he became unconscious of them.' Confining ourselves to our own literature and leaving aside all foreigners—the Russians, for example, or Zola—we might ask her what about Shelley whom she herself has mentioned by name. Or what about Wordsworth whose early inspiration was 'Nature' admittedly but Nature harnessed to a revolutionary social doctrine? And even with the great Victorians 'All's well with the world' was not their most typical slogan; is *In Memoriam*

THE TOWER THAT ONCE

a poem of placid or unconscious acceptance? 'Life was not going to change,' writes Mrs. Woolf; Tennyson said something different in *Locksley Hall*. And what about William Morris? Or Henry James, for whom (according to Mrs. Woolf) as for (according to her too) his predecessors the social barometer was Set Fair for ever? Mr. Spender put forward a different, but at least as plausible a view of James in *The Destructive Element*.

Mrs. Woolf assumes that a period of great social and political unrest is adverse to literature. I do not think she produces adequate evidence for this; we could counter with the Peloponnesian War, the factions of Florence in the time of Dante, the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the Franco-Prussian War; but, even if she is right, she should not attack my generation for being conditioned by its conditions. Do not let us be misled by her metaphor of the Tower. The point of this metaphor was that a certain group of young writers found themselves on a leaning tower; this presupposes that the rest of the world remained on the level. But it just didn't. The whole world in our time went more and more on the slant so that no mere abstract geometry or lyrical uplift could cure it. When Mrs. Woolf accuses the Thirties writers of 'flogging a dead or dying horse because a living horse, if flogged, would kick them off its back,' her point seems to me facile. No doubt we spent too much time in satirizing the Blimps, but some of those old dead horses—as this war shows every week—have a kick in them still. And the ruling class of the Thirties, the people above the Blimps, our especial *bête noir* or *cheval noir*, did manage to kick us into the jaws of destruction. But it remains to be seen who will be proved to have died; we'll hope it was the horse.

She proceeds to a surprising sentence: 'How can a writer who has no first-hand experience of a towerless, of a classless society create that society?' How can a larva with no first-hand experience of flight ever grow wings? On the premises implied in this sentence human society is incapable of willed or directed change. Because, quite apart from the

LOUIS MACNEICE

intelligentsia and the privileged classes, there is nobody in the whole population of Great Britain who has had first-hand experience of that kind of society which nearly everybody needs. Mrs. Woolf is making the same mistake as some of the very writers she is attacking. For some of those writers were hamstrung by modesty. It all, they said to themselves, depends on the proletariat. And in a sense they were right. But they were wrong to assume that the proletariat itself knew where it was going or could get there by its own volition. These intellectuals tended to betray the proletariat by professing to take all their cues from it.

Mrs. Woolf deplores the 'didacticism' of the Thirties. But (1) if the world was such a mess as she admits, it was inevitable and right that writers should be didactic (compare the position of Euripides), (2) she assumes that this writing—especially the poetry—of the Thirties was solely and crudely didactic—which it was not. She makes an inept comparison between a morsel of Stephen Spender and a morsel of Wordsworth as exemplifying 'the difference between politician's poetry and poet's poetry': this ignores the fact that the great bulk of Wordsworth is pamphleteering and that Spender's poetry is pre-eminently the kind—to use her own words—'that people remember when they are alone.' Politician's poetry? Look at Spender's professedly political play, *Trial of a Judge*: it failed as a play just because it was not 'public' but rather a personal apologia; it displeased the Communists just because it sacrificed propaganda values to honesty.

It is often assumed by the indiscriminating—among whom for this occasion I must rank Mrs. Woolf—that all these writers of the Thirties were the slaves of Marx, or rather of Party Line Marxism. Marx was certainly a most powerful influence. But why? It was not because of his unworkable economics, it was not because of the pedantic jigsaw of his history, it was because he said: '*Our job is to change it.*' What called a poet like Spender to Marx was the same thing that called Shelley to Godwin and Rousseau. But some at least

THE TOWER THAT ONCE

of these poets—in particular Auden and Spender—always recognized the truth of Thomas Mann's dictum: 'Karl Marx must read Friedrich Hölderlin.' •Even an orthodox Communist Party critic, Christopher Caudwell, in his book *Illusion and Reality*, insisted (rightly) that poetry can never be reduced to political advertising, that its method is myth and that it must represent not any set of ideas which can be formulated by politicians or by scientists or by mere Reason and/or mere Will—it must represent something much deeper and wider which he calls the 'Communal Ego.' It is this Communal Ego with which Auden and Spender concerned themselves.

Politician's poetry? Yes, there was some of it; and some of it was bad. Rex Warner, for example, lost his touch when he turned from birds to polemics. Day Lewis's social satire cannot compare with his love lyrics. Auden and Isherwood's *On the Frontier* was worse than a flop. Mr. Edward Upward ruined his novel, *Journey to the Border*, with his use of the *Deus ex Machina*—i.e. 'the Workers'—at the end. But these mistakes are nothing to their achievements and it is grotesque to dismiss someone like Auden as a mere 'politician's poet' and an ineffectual one at that; was it not Auden who repudiated the Public Face in the Private Place? It is carrying the Nelson eye too far to pretend that Auden and Spender did not bring new life into English poetry and what was more—in spite of what Mrs. Woolf says about self-pity—a new spirit of hopefulness (see some of Spender's early lyrics). As for the novel, Mrs. Woolf suggests that, whereas her own generation could create objective character and colour, her successors can manage nothing but either autobiography or black and white cartoons. I would ask the reader—with no disrespect to *Mrs. Dalloway*, a book that I like very much—to compare Mrs. Woolf's 'Mrs. Dalloway' with Mr. Isherwood's 'Mr. Norris.'

Self-pity? Of course our work embodied some self-pity. But look at Mrs. Woolf's beloved nineteenth century. 'Anger, pity, scapegoat beating, excuse finding'—she intones

LOUIS MACNEICE

against the poor lost Thirties; you find all those things—in full measure and running over—in the Romantic Revival and right down from *Manfred* or Keats' Odes through Tennyson and Swinburne and Rossetti to the death-wish of the Fin de Siècle and even to Mr. Prufrock. My generation at least put some salt in it. And we never, even at our most martyred, produced such a holocaust of self-pity as Shelley in *Adonais*.

Mrs. Woolf deplores our 'curious bastard language,' but I notice that in the next stage of society and poetry she looks forward to a 'pooling' of vocabularies and dialects. Just one more inconsistency. And Shakespeare wrote in a bastard language too.

This is no occasion to put forward a *Credo* of my own, but I would like to assure Mrs. Woolf (speaking for myself, but it is true of most of my colleagues) that I am not solely concerned with 'destruction.' Some destruction, yes; but not of all the people or all the values all the time. And I have no intention of recanting my past. Recantation is becoming too fashionable; I am sorry to see so much self-flagellation, so many *Peccavis*, going on on the literary Left. We may not have done all we could in the Thirties, but we did do something. We were right to throw mud at Mrs. Woolf's old horses and we were right to advocate social reconstruction and we were even right—in our more lyrical work—to give personal expression to our feelings of anxiety, horror and despair (for even despair can be fertile). As for the Leaning Tower, if Galileo had not had one at Pisa, he would not have discovered the truth about falling weights. We learned something of the sort from our tower too.

JOHN LEHMANN

A POSTSCRIPT

VIRGINIA WOOLF wrote few essays more provocative than *The Leaning Tower* in the last issue of *Folios of New Writing*; and the controversy which has arisen around it, the retorts of some of the writers who felt themselves misjudged or misrepresented in her arguments, have tended to leave the impression that Virginia Woolf was unsympathetic, even hostile towards the ideals and the actual achievements of the poets of a younger generation.

This is very far from the truth, and as a contemporary of the 'Leaning Tower' writers she discusses and an associate with her in publishing much of their work, on and off, for over ten years, I feel I can make a useful contribution towards correcting these impressions.

Anyone who knew Virginia Woolf at all well must keep among their most vivid memories the astonishing vitality of her interest in what was being attempted by the living artists, poets, novelists around her. And this interest and curiosity was by no means confined to her own generation; again and again in conversations and in letters she would raise the subject of new authors who were at the start of their careers. She would ask for information about them, she would explain what she admired and what she found difficult to accept in their work, would ask one to throw light on it for her, and suggest meetings and talks and discussions in print. In a letter to me in September 1931, when we were planning the series of 'Hogarth Letters,' and I had asked her to write her *Letter to a Young Poet*, she wrote that the idea very much took her fancy—'because I'm seething with immature and ill-considered and wild and annoying ideas about prose and poetry. . . . The whole subject is crying out

JOHN LEHMANN

for letters—flocks, volleys of them, from every side. Why not get Spender and Auden and Day Lewis to join in ? ’

Many of these ideas she worked out in the *Letter*, and showed a very lively understanding of the problems that the poet of the 'thirties tried to solve, imagining herself into his place in a way that would be beyond the power of most writers of an older generation. The theory she put forward was that when he was writing about the world within himself he was successful in making a real contribution to poetry; she returns to this idea in *The Leaning Tower*, when she says of him that: ‘ He has had the courage to tell the truth, the unpleasant truth, about himself. That is the first step towards telling the truth about other people. By analysing themselves honestly, with help from Dr. Freud, these writers have done a great deal to free us from nineteenth-century superstitions. The writers of the next generation may inherit from them a whole state of mind, a mind no longer crippled, evasive, divided.’ When, however, he began to write about the modern world that he saw outside himself, she maintained that his medium broke down—‘ the poem is cracked in the middle. Look, it comes apart in my hands: here is reality on one side, here is beauty on the other. . . .’ This was the explanation she offered of her feeling that so much that was written at the time of the publication of *New Signatures* failed to come off as *poetry*. But she never insisted on her theories, because her mind was too keen and fond of exploration to be satisfied for long with anything that might be a half-truth. In a letter to me in July 1932 she wrote: ‘ I do feel that the young poet is rather crudely jerked between realism and beauty, to put it roughly. I think he is all to be praised for attempting to swallow Mrs. Gape*; but he ought to assimilate her. What it seems to me is that he doesn’t sufficiently believe in her; doesn’t dig himself in deep enough; wakes up in the middle; his imagination goes off the boil; he doesn’t reach the unconscious automatic state—hence the spasmodic, jerky, self-conscious effect of his realistic language. But I

* The imaginary charwoman of the *Letter*.

A POSTSCRIPT

may be transferring to him some of the ill-effects of my own struggles the other way round—with poetry in prose. . . . The fact is, I'm not at all satisfied with the letter, and would like to tear up, or entirely re-write. It is a bad form for criticism, because it seems to invite archness and playfulness, and when one has done being playful the time's up and there's no room for more.'

Virginia Woolf was neither insensitive to the difficulties and discoveries of younger writers nor to the great injustices in the way the world is arranged. She was a socialist, and no one could doubt her sympathy with the struggles of working-class people, particularly working-class women, and her belief in the value of their long, historic effort to make themselves articulate, who has read her Introductory Letter to the volume of reminiscences of Co-operative working women called *Life As We Have Known It*. But, as that essay brings out very clearly, she was always conscious of belonging to another class, and felt that it was impossible for her to be more than a sympathetic observer, that an element of insincerity would inevitably creep in if she were to make out that their hopes and hates were hers in equal measure. One of her criticisms of the writers of the 'thirties was that we were not sufficiently clear about our own position; but her main criticism arose from her distrust of groups and counter-groups among writers, her dislike of literature being harnessed to political—or any other—slogans of the moment. 'You are an immensely ancient, complex, and continuous character,' she says in the *Letter to a Young Poet*, 'for which reason please treat yourself with respect and think twice before you dress up as Guy Fawkes and spring out upon timid old ladies at street corners, threatening death and demanding twopence-halfpenny.' She knew that modern poets must be aware of the rumblings under the crust of the old world, and assimilate that awareness into their poetry; but she wanted them never to forget or deny the advantages they had gained from the old world which made it possible for them to be poets. She knew that the working classes were beginning to find their

JOHN LEHMANN

voice, but she wanted them not to imagine that the qualities arising from more direct contact with the hard facts of existence which they could contribute would ever be enough. Her belief was reconciliation, mutual enrichment. In the *Introductory Letter*, she says of working women: 'if it were possible to meet them not as masters or customers with a counter between us, but over the wash-tub or in the parlour casually and congenially as fellow beings with the same wants and ends in view, a great liberation would follow, and perhaps friendship and sympathy. How many words must lurk in those women's vocabularies that have faded from ours! How many scenes must lie dormant in their eye which are unseen by ours! What images and saws and proverbial sayings must still be current with them that have never reached the surface of print. . . . And they remain equally deprived. For we have as much to give them as they to give us—wit and detachment, learning and poetry, and all those good gifts which those who have never answered bells or minded machines enjoy by right.'

Virginia Woolf might remain unimpressed by qualities in harmony with 'the movement' in a young poet's work which gave him a momentary success, but she was always on the look-out for a genuine flash of imagination, for the moments when feeling and idea, rhythm and word-music fused suddenly into poetry, and though she might express her criticism with witty malice and exaggeration, the discovery of those moments of poetry gave her real delight. For years nearly all the manuscripts that were submitted to the Hogarth Press passed through her hands, and she was always anxious to encourage even the slightest signs of talent among newcomers, and to urge publication whenever it was possible. Only a few weeks before her death, we were discussing a volume of poems which a young author was anxious for the Hogarth Press to publish. She complained that she found many of them obscure and confusing; yet the music and imagery of lines and stanzas here and there had attracted her and she believed there was promise of achievement to

A POSTSCRIPT

come. There was something in it; and she was looking for this 'something' to very near the end, for one of her last acts was to read through a batch of stories and poems by unknown writers which had been sent to us, and prepare her comments on them.



FRANK SARGESON

TWO STORIES

TOD

THE little boy and his sister, somewhat younger, stood by the fence and sung out, Tod! You sing out, he said. And she sung out, Tod! Then he sung out, Tod!

The kitten came treading over the grass towards them, but when the little boy made a grab it bounded off sideways, its tail in the air, its back arched in a hoop. It stopped to cuff at a dandelion—once, twice, three times, then it ran up a post of the fence and clung there.

The little boy and his sister squealed with delight. They forgot to sing out, Tod!

Kitty, the little boy said, and he made another grab.

This time he caught the kitten. He held it by the loose skin on its back, the kitten struggling, and his sister trying to snatch it from him. The kitten got away and then the little boy hit his sister in the face with both hands. She sat down with a bump and yelled.

Her brother went and stood by the fence. Tod! he sang out. And he kept on singing out, Tod!

The little girl stopped crying and her brother went over and got down beside her. He put his arms round her and tried to give her a kiss, but she turned her face away. So he went and picked the dandelion that the kitten had cuffed.

Here you are dear, he said.

He put the dandelion in her hand, and she let him give her a kiss.

Over by the fence the little boy sang out, Tod! come on over. Go on, he said, you sing out. And she sang out too. And then they both sang out together.

TWO STORIES

They went on singing out until the little girl began to hiccup.

Stop doing that, her brother said.

His sister hiccupped and he thumped her on the back.

Leave me alone, she said, and she hiccupped.

He thumped her, and then he swung his right arm back and thumped her as hard as he could.

She yelled again. I'm going to tell on you, she said, and crying for all she was worth she trotted off into the house.

But her brother stayed by the fence, singing out, Tod! Everything would be just all right if only Tod would come on over. And he was far too young to know that he hadn't got the name exactly right.

A MAN AND HIS WIFE

It was during the slump, when times were bad. Bad times are different from good times, people's habits aren't quite the same. When the slump was on you didn't have to worry about certain things. The way you were dressed, for instance. Along the street you'd meet too many who were as hard put to it as you were yourself. That's one thing the slump did, it put a certain sort of comradeship into life that you don't find now.

During the slump people had to live where they could, and a lot of them lived in sheds and wash-houses in other people's backyards. I lived in an old shed that had once been a stable, and it was all right except for the rats. It was out towards the edge of the town, and there were two of us living there, and my cobber was on relief work like myself. There'd been some trouble between him and his wife, so when he had to get out he came and lived with me. It cut the rent in half, and there was room enough. And Ted was quite a good hand at rigging up a table and suchlike out of any odds and ends he could pick up. He got quite a lot

FRANK SARGESON

of pickings from a rubbish tip that was handy, and with me giving him a hand we made a fireplace and got the place pretty snug, which it needed to be for the winter. It wasn't a bad sort of life. We never went short of tucker, though a few times we had to raid a Chinaman's garden after we'd spent all our money in the pubs. As a single man, I'd only get about a day and a half's relief work a week, and drew fourteen shillings. Ted got more but of course there was his wife, and he had to part up.

I knew Ted only casually until I struck him on relief. He hadn't long been in the town. He'd had a good job in a pub, but he went on the booze once too often. To start with he wasn't so hot with a shovel, and the gang used to pull his leg, but he was a good-tempered bloke, and as I say there grew up that comradeship when the slump was on. It was pretty hard for him when his wife got her separation, because it was all in the paper, and everybody started making jokes. When she got in Court his wife certainly got going about the sort of husband he was. Besides always getting drunk, she said, he kept a dog, and he'd talk to the dog when he'd never talk to her. He was always taking the dog for walks too, and once when she tried to go along as well he locked her in the wash-house and never let her out until he came home. Well, our gang certainly thought up plenty of jokes about that dog.

When he came to my place, Ted brought the dog. It was nothing special, just a dog, but Ted was certainly fond of it. He had it sleeping at the foot of his bed, and I only put up with it because it was good for the rats. But later on it got under a bus along the road and that was the finish. Ted took it pretty hard, but he wasn't the sort that ever says much. He never told me anything about the trouble he'd had with his wife. There are men who'll talk to you about such things, but it's more often you find women that way. And Ted's wife was the sort. She'd call sometimes to collect her money, though if Ted saw her coming up the road he'd hook off if he could before she got near. And if he couldn't

TWO STORIES

I'd hook off while they had their barney. But usually Ted would have a fair idea when she was coming and wouldn't be around, and then Mrs. Watts would talk to me. She was quite all right, quite a nice woman, though always a bit on edge so to speak. She'd say quite a lot. Ted spent too much money on drink, she said, but it was the dog that was the trouble. A man ought to put his wife first, she said. She wouldn't have minded so much if it had been another woman. She couldn't understand it, she said. Well, maybe I couldn't either, so I felt sorry for Mrs. Watts. But I felt sorry for Ted too, so I never told her when the dog was done in. I thought maybe things would come right if they were just left alone.

It didn't work out though, because one day Ted came home with a canary, and he certainly began to think the world of that canary. It just about made me think that he might be a bit unnatural, though I didn't think he was, because one night when some of the gang were round and we were all a bit stonkered, Ted told us about how his missis once ran a fish shop and had a girl serving behind the counter for a pound a week. And it was only a shame she was worth the money, Ted said. His wife used to complain that the pound made too big a hole in the profits, but as for him he reckoned the girl was well worth the money. But of course we all chipped in to say he was a dirty old man, and it was no wonder his missis had kicked him out.

But about the canary. Ted loved that bird. He worshipped it. And anyway, it certainly could sing. Ted'd make himself late for work in the morning talking to it and seeing it was all O.K., and he paid a neighbour's little girl sixpence a week to always run over and put the cage inside the window if it came on to rain. And when we got home it was no good expecting him to lend a hand because he'd just want to sit down and kid to the bird. I'd tell him he was a goat, but it did no good. Even when the dinner was cooked it was no good telling him to come and eat, he'd sooner just sit there and kid to the bird.

FRANK SARGESON

There was another thing too. Ted'd get all hot and bothered if anybody began to take too much of an interest in his bird. He didn't mind me so much, though I sort of felt I had to keep off the grass. It was when there was a crowd round that he'd get properly hot and bothered. We'd have some rare old times some evenings when there was a crowd round, usually some of the boys in the gang. We'd fill up the baby. We had a big demijohn that we used to call the baby, and we'd all put in and then toss to see who'd go and get her filled up. And an old suitcase that Ted'd got from the rubbish tip came in handy for the purpose. Well, evenings when we'd had the baby filled would get Ted all hot and bothered. Because once they were a bit stonkered the boys would want to have a bo-peep at the bird while he was asleep. If you were careful you could look under the cloth Ted put over the cage at night and see him standing on one leg with his head tucked in, and his feathers all fluffed up. And it was certainly great to see him sleeping there, specially considering the noise and the smoke. He'd always be a bit steady on his one leg and the boys'd argue about that, some saying it was because of his heart beating, and others that he was only balancing. But of course Ted'd be all on edge trying to keep everybody away, and he'd go crook if somebody moved the cloth too much and woke the poor little blighter up, which was usually what happened.

Well, for months on end Ted just about lived for that canary. Then later on he decided it didn't get enough exercise inside the cage, so he tried a stunt. We'd shut the door and the window and Ted'd let the bird out of the cage, and it certainly seemed to enjoy the outing. And Ted thought he was a clever bloke when he'd taught it to sit on his shoulder, though when he put seed in his hair to get it to go up on top it wasn't a success, because the bird got its feet tangled, and I had to cut off some hair to get it away, which reminded me how once on a sheep farm I found a little skeleton tangled in the wool on a sheep's back. In the end though, Ted did a stupid thing, he left the window open

TWO STORIES

while the bird was having its outing. I said wasn't he taking a risk, but he said no, the bird loved him too much ever to fly away. And certainly for a time it just did its usual stuff, sitting on Ted's shoulder and hopping about on the table. Though when it decided to go it didn't waste any time. It up and nipped out that window just as fast as it was a sparrow that had blown in by mistake. For a time it hung about in a tree while Ted walked round and round underneath with the cage in his hand. And watching the pair of them I thought the bird was rubbing it in, because up in the tree it sounded to me as if it was singing better than ever it did before.

The next morning Ted was gone before I was awake. The cage was gone too, and Ted never turned up at work and lost a day's pay. It was no good though, he never found the bird. Later on we talked it over and I said he'd better try another dog, but he said no. I've still got the wife, he said. Yes, I said. The wife never let me down, he said. No, I said. It was all I could think of to say. He put his things together and went right away, and it wasn't long before I was going round regularly twice a week for a game of cards with the pair of them. But right until the finish of the slump I was living on my own, and occasionally I'd sort of wish that Ted hadn't been so careless with his canary.

LAWRENCE LITTLE

THREE POEMS

I

STREET MARKET

SOMEWHERE fishbarrows are—
There is the damp smell of fish
And the splash
Of held careless hoses on bare
Brittle tiles,
And fishmongers' calls.

Lorries wind slowly there,
Gear-change in halting at stalls
Where girls curse
At hair-hindrance and customers
Pass, or pause
To examine their purse.

Flex from electric lamps
Hanging above the poor pavements
Shakes with the wind's movements,
Looks on tense heads
And, with its glimpse
Of their troubles, shakes

With the white ends
Of cracked packing cases
Kicked to the gutter in pieces,
Where the sawdusted boots
Of a boy loiter,
Disturbing the litter.

THREE POEMS

Fruit is flattened upon
The tar wood swelling road,
Pulp-covered with live mauve-red
Of all ripeness stalk-severed,
Juice-sodden and wet
With a broom to await.

Women hidden beneath
Fat that is aproned, sag hips
With a sigh, forget hopes,
Forget all but their pocket,
What has happened before
And what will in the market:

' Trade with its eddies
Born bitter is binder
Is breaker is bender
Has made us and muddies
Our minds with its practice:
Has bought us and sacked us.'

II

THE UNCERTAINTY

THE irresolute sun turned, and was cloud
Caught, confusedly wrapped grey,
Steam-surfaced, sapped of its light-load,
divorced from its day.

The sparrow's beak dropped its blossom;
Trees branch-lopped, swelled larger and grew hard
Outlined; ferns stiffened, once lissom;
cold, colour was marred.

LAWRENCE LITTLE

The winds flattened, fell frailly
Fell with acceptance on to the grass ground,
Curled, crouched in each rutted gully,
sank with a sigh-sound.

The sky in a quick rash blotched black
And came closer, hung ashly, unthinking,
Watched our trials, timidity, with a bleak,
a dislike look, unblinking.

Clouds without aim waddled
Out of obscure seclusion, in a herd
Wedged confusion, edge-merged and muddled,
face-drunken and blurred,

And covered the common, the part of a city,
Mansions, the meat-mart, the site
Of a clothes store's expansion, putty
beginning to dry white,

All with rain's soddenness, slim
Millions of down-drips, full pourings,
The sly wetness invading the home,
halls, and their floorings,

Their intricate parquets, patterned
With someone's precision; nothing escapes
It catches uncomfortable flesh, buttoned
within, guarded by capes;

It flails, threshes the tree-heads,
Loads leaves like tenacious snails, bends
All beauty still standing that revels in rain-raids
and the vigour that rain sends.

THREE POEMS

III

SPEECH: FOR A LEGLESS MAN

Cut the world's legs off
And let us say, with this man's monotony,
Thank you and thank you for the cutting off.

If we had danced on stumps
For a gutter year, worked in the whip-smell
Of drains whose cheeks are plump

With the futters of filth and rain
We should not be griped so well.
Preposterousness makes plain

What in its casual dribs
Drugs us below into the raddled fens
Where sucked authority gibbers

Through moving and flashy mouths, coils and pens
Feeding our yawmering beaks
With biled meals of words, few out of many

Thrown by frail once integrity
At our indifferent worlds past. But as the weight
Of our sores on one edge would bitterly

Cut where now with its diffuseness
It dents, envy our maiming, it may
Yet belch open our lives' long bogged-under vents.

A. H. TEECE

TWO STORIES

THE WORM

WHEN at about nine o'clock one evening James Turton dropped from the bus, still aglow from the good humour of the company he had left half an hour ago, his wife was standing at the gate. He understood from her that his sister had died suddenly during the time he had been away. He threw himself down on the small square of front lawn, regardless of anyone who might see him, and writhed convulsively in his remorse, his black, unbuttoned overcoat trailing on either side like the wings of a pipistrelle. He was bitterly angry with himself that it should have happened while he had been enjoying himself so much with the others at the 'Holly Bush.'

He opened the door of his sister's house ; he had come there as quickly as he could. A cat slipped out into the garden, brushing past his legs. He went through the kitchen into the hall, where dust-motes hung in the beams of light from the small, leaded windows.

She was lying on the couch in the front room, dressed as she always was, her head and shoulders propped above the rest of her body. The curtains were undrawn, and strong sunlight made the room look faded. Standing over her, he seemed only at that moment to realize the full extent of his neglect, and the sudden perception of it kept thrusting into his mind and making it impossible for him to order his thoughts.

She had been the eldest of the sisters. Now she must be well over sixty. Yet for the last five years she had been living there alone, providing for herself and looking after the house with hardly any assistance from outside. All the

TWO STORIES

time she had continued keen-witted and active ; the garden, for instance, she had kept entirely by herself, except for having a man in occasionally to do the heaviest digging.

He had not visited her often. Duty had seemed the motive that sent him on most of the visits, though afterwards he would admit candidly that they gave him pleasure, and resolve to go oftener. But the resolve soon lost its force.

Each time he had found that something of their early sympathy remained. Yet sometimes it almost seemed to him that he shrank from renewing fully the understanding that had once been between them, though his vague reluctance never crystallized into anything upon which his mind could seize and reason. He tried to justify his own attitude by regarding her as something of an institution that would remain always present ; he could postpone the complete restoration of understanding until the most fitting time presented itself. The practical result had been that he continued unable to give her help in most things without embarrassment, and consequently the help had stayed untendered. Now the lost opportunities reproached him like children dead through neglect.

Suddenly her head turned from one side to the other, and her mouth opened and shut, her eyes remaining closed. He hoped she was still alive ; then he could repair all his omissions, and everything would be as it once had been years ago. Quickly he stooped to kiss her mouth, but the lips were coldly rigid, like rocks thinly coated with ice. He drew back rapidly, but in spite of the aversion nerved himself to repeat the action three or four times.

Within three inches of his eyes the whiteness of the sheet showed faintly, but nothing else in the bedroom was visible. He tried to persuade himself of the impossibility of what had happened, yet it seemed to possess a power of convincing strong enough to overcome the presumptions of the material things round him. The fact that he was now awake was inconclusive, and he felt in need of more concrete proof,

A. H. TEECE

but the darkness hindered him. For a long time he lay uncertain, unable to sleep, more than half believing the truth of the experience.

Without waiting for his breakfast he shut the front door and went down to the gate ; the familiarity of the scene, and its identical correspondence with what had happened, increased his desire for proof. He walked for some distance between the rows of suburban houses, and turned left to cross the stile of a field-path. The air was biting cold, the frost eating like acid through his skin. Rime lay over the fields, the foliage of the bushes wilted, in the path the stones had sunk deeper into the soil, leaving small holes like craters. Straggling flocks of larks rose from the clover-fields ; rooks drooped like rags on the posts. The mist hung at no great distance ; firs occasionally broke up the thin, crackling tracery of the larger trees. The nearer he approached his sister's house, the more certain he felt of the truth of what had taken place. He came to a lane, walked two hundred yards along it, and opened the gate of the solitary house.

Frost had made the windows opaque. He knocked and opened the door. She looked up half surprised from the fire, on which she had been replacing the kettle. He came in, said a few words about the coldness of the day, hardly believing what he was saying, and warmed himself by the hearth. She talked for some minutes as she did work in the kitchen. All the time he felt uneasy, and left as soon as he could.

He walked back slowly along the stone path to the road. Near the gate there was a worm, frozen rigid. It fascinated him though he wanted to leave it. Beginning with a curled, bluish-red tip, it lay flat along the ground, and then rose stiffly into the air at an angle ; there it had broken in two, and a small black core showed in the centre of the palely flesh-coloured circle. He moved away with difficulty, yet somehow feeling relieved for the first time that day.

TWO STORIES

THE BELOVED

I AM being loved. Don't congratulate me, for it isn't at all pleasant. In fact it's about the unpleasantest thing I've come across in my whole life.

It all began when the manager of the fitting shop started asking me up to his house. We'd grown friendly through having the same interests, and got on pretty well together. He lives with a sister of his ; she must be about five years younger, though it's difficult to judge her age, and he is just over forty. She is a little thin shrunken thing, with an untidy fringe of darkish hair, and a jerky little walk, like a crank going up and down. With your standards, you probably wouldn't think of her as a woman at all. She always wears black for her mother, who can't have died very recently ; at any rate, it was before I met her brother, and I have known him some time.

I don't remember noticing her much on the first night, but I hadn't been there more than three or four times before she started loving me. Heaven knows why, for I didn't give her any cause to. When I was talking to her brother she'd be watching me all the time without taking her eyes off me. It used to disturb me when I saw her doing it, and I'd forget what I was going to say. I'd notice her lips moving as if she was smiling and pleased with herself.

She had rather a childish sort of voice, and when she was trying to sound very agreeable I came to loathe it, particularly as when she didn't think you'd taken proper notice of what she'd said, which wasn't seldom, she'd got an irritating way of keeping on saying it over again till she thought you had. Whenever she'd the chance, she would try to sit as near to me as she could. Every time I felt her touching me, I'd find myself drawing back as from something disagreeable. She often touches me, trying to make it seem accidental. I never make an effort to hide the shudder, but she keeps on doing it all the same. She's doting on me all the time till I feel I can't go on standing it much longer.

A. H. TEECE

Then she started sending me messages. The first one I got was a post-card with only the address, 'Mr. Frank Hingley, 37 Shepwell Street, Bradfield,' and 'Love from Mary,' and three crosses. The postman gave it me with a parcel, and I could see the smile he was trying to hide crinkling round the corners of his mouth. I didn't answer it, but she still keeps sending me them.

Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad if I was as interested in women as you are, but I've never done much in that line. Somehow I never wanted to particularly, and as charge-hand the machines took up a lot of my time. I probably did more at that than I should, really, but I enjoyed doing it, and so I didn't bother much about the time it took. I've always thought there's something beautiful about the symmetry of machines and the regular, orderly way they go about their work, and I've always liked the easy manner you can have complete control over the biggest of them. When there was some strike nonsense about wages last March and a strip of a lad tried to muck up the tool-room lathe with a hacksaw, I felt like giving him a push on to the machine and letting it take what retribution it liked. It seemed such a monstrous thing to try to mar a machine like that, like killing someone who'd done you no harm. That may sound a bit strange, but I've always liked that sense of orderliness you get in the machines.

I've started to hate each visit to the house, yet I can't very well keep refusing to go. If I kept staying away her brother would probably take offence, more so if he thought it was because I didn't like his sister, for he's got quite an affection for her, and my prospects at the works wouldn't be any too rosy. Or he might think I stopped away because there'd been something between us, and that would be a lot worse. And I think he can see there's something queer going on.

I can't see matters keeping on much longer as they are ; I don't think I can go on hating her like this, I feel I shall start loving her in a kind of unwilling fascination and a

TWO STORIES

repulsive, unnatural enjoyment in doing what I've up to now despised. And sometimes I hate myself for hating her, and I begin to pity her. I'd pity her more, only I get angered by a feeling she is always giving her attention to me, and I keep on being aware of her interest in me as if it was some unwelcome presence. All of it is getting on my nerves. Last week I caught my hand on a machine, a thing I haven't done for years, and took some of the skin off my knuckles.

Last night I went into the town. It was a Saturday night, and there were a good many people sauntering along the pavements outside the shops, and a lot standing about waiting to go in the pictures. When I was going past the Town Hall something touched me, and I shuddered. I knew it was her, though I couldn't see her among the people. As I walked through the crowds I kept on being touched, and I kept shuddering. I was certain who it was. As I went by four youths talking under a lamp I heard one say, 'An' when I sees 'er agen, I'll gie 'er summat ter think abart.' I felt like that then. If I'd caught her I don't know what I'd have done. Then just as I was going by the church, she seemed to be coming unbearably near to me. It felt horrible. I began to run, yet I couldn't get away from her. I went running straight down the middle of High Street as fast as I could. Everybody must have been staring at me, but I didn't think about that then. I only remember seeing a grocer's white apron, the new modern clock they've put up over the boot shop, and the shadow of a man shaping to play a stroke with a billiard cue on the blind of an upper window. But I didn't get rid of the feeling by running, it got stronger. It was like as if some loathsome, sticky oil was surrounding me, and it kept pressing round me worse every second. I felt I couldn't stand it much longer, and I thought I should choke. . . . And then I found myself lying on the settee in my lodgings, with my feet hanging over the end.

I've thought to-day I must have dreamt it, but it seemed

A. H. TEECE

too real and connected for that. Besides, I've had just the same feeling before when she was near me, only this time it was much stronger. I wish I could think all of it was an unpleasant dream, like I tried to when my father died. But if I could, I suppose it wouldn't much matter. I should still have to go on enduring it all the time, wondering if I should wake up in a cold sweat before it got unbearable. Only, dream or no dream, it doesn't look very much like ending up as nicely as a pleasant awakening with me.

ADAM DRINAN

THREE POEMS FROM A SEQUENCE

I

IN a field of yellow iris on the coast
marching to relieve the sentries at their post
a file of three men met a file of three old ghosts.

‘ Anna, grey ghost, why were you gathering sea-tangle
on the stones spreading sea-tangle
on the soil strewing sea-tangle
thin on this thin land of yours ? ’

‘ Because the man had died that should be tilling the land
died by a hand that should have been toiling on the land
died for him that should have been tyrant of the land
King to this fine land of ours.’

‘ Giorsal, grey ghost, why were you gathering fairy-wool
at the wheel not spinning sheep’s wool
at the loom not weaving sheep’s wool
fairy-tale in this old island of yours ? ’

‘ Because the man had gone that should be shearing wool
gone oversea because of the price for the spinning wool
profit to merchants selling back to them that weave the
wool
Fairy-tale now, this island of mine.’

‘ Iosbail, grey lady, why will you be pulling sphagnum-moss
for whose bed this softness of sphagnum-flock
for what tapestry this many-coloured sphagnum-yarn,
what history of these highlands of yours ? ’.

ADAM DRINAN

' For my boy who was sent away by the rich that bough
them
who has returned to fight for the rich that bought them—
Easier he that has been wounded for the rich that bought
them
will lie in dressings pulled from these Highlands of
ours.'

Drillings of twenty men on parade rough
on flinty road grounding of rifle-butts
assemblings of machine-guns on the loch front.

II

Forty men flinging themselves on heather sodden
practising approach in extending order
up to the ribs in peat-haggs, to the knees in bog.

Dear to me, to the exile, and to the stranger
this land of lochans and extravagant mountains
the laird has leased for his profit to the stranger
splashing of sea-pies
whipping of water
lapping of a great sea
on a rock.

Dear to me, to the exile, and to the stranger
this land of misty moors and blue sea lochs
the laird has leased to the stranger for his pleasure
nodding of blue violet
soaring of blue violet
beauty of blue violet
in a bog.

THREE POEMS FROM A SEQUENCE

This little bog flower, that traps the insects
that only survives because of the coming of insects
dear to me, to the exile, and to the stranger

crashing of bombs
rattling of machine-guns
placing of great tanks
on the land

If it comes, will laird and stranger give us back our land ?
or treat with our enemy to keep them on their land
dear to me, dear to my brother in exile ?

III

MACLEIÒD and I tramping the starlit road
two men prick-eared on night patrol
two men resting rifles on a stone.

A pit cut out of turf in a circle of stones
at the mouth of a glen rough with a river in front
a screen of mountains bracing against rout.

' Time raised the mountains dynamic over the low seaboard '
I said ' Time has reduced our warriors to sleepers.
But time must draw the hungry seagull seaward.'

' This field is known as the Battlefield of the Big Men '
said he ' The English maps surrender to the Gaelic.
My ancestors dead here no separate profits weakened.

' But whose the loving, sorrowful hands
lifted these stones into their simple haunt
embedded now in the evergrowing badge of the clan ?

' The hands that laid them have been taken away
houses and crops and cattle taken away
sheep were brought to nibble the goodness of the blade.

ADAM DRINAN

' And who were they who worked, who fought here ?

Let the bleached sheep's skull hold their names.

And who lamented, worked and wept here ?

Ferns' harps shall throb their names

but not the english

and not the gaelic

give me likelier answer.'

Two men straining eyes and ears in the twilight

two men frowning out on a future starlit.

Here it will happen, here

on this moor,

as I, Adhamh Dríonnan, foretell it ;

a small white pebble with an eyelet through it

the eye to the hole and the mind to the mood

to-morrow's age in the aperture of this youth :—

ODYSSEUS ELYTIS

ANNIVERSARY

Translated from the modern Greek by D. Capetanakis

I BROUGHT my life as far as this
Point that struggles
Always by the sea
Youth on the rocks, hand
To hand with the wind
Where is a man going
Who is nothing but a man
Measuring his green moments with
Their coolness, the visions of his
Ears with waters, his remorse with wings
O Life
Of the boy that becomes a man
Always by the sea when the sun
Teaches him to breathe forward where the shadow
Of a seagull vanishes

I brought my life as far as this
White addition black total
A few trees and a few
Wet pebbles
Light fingers to caress a forehead
What forehead
The expectations wept all night and no one is any more
No one is
To make us hear a free step
To make us see the sunrise of an untired voice
To make the ships bounding by the jetty write

ODYSSEUS ELYTIS

A name of a purer azure in their horizon
A few years, a few waves
Sensitive rowing
In the harbours round the love

I brought my life as far as this
Bitter cutting in the sand that will vanish
—whoever saw two eyes touching his silence
And mingled their suns enclosing thousands of worlds
Must remind the other suns of his blood
Nearer the light
There is a smile that repays the flame—
But here in the unaware landscape vanishing
In an open and merciless sea,
Success is dispersed
Whirling feathers
And moments that were bound to the earth
Hard earth under the impatient
Soles, earth made for giddiness
Dead volcano.

I brought my life as far as this.
A stone promised to the liquid element
Beyond the islands
Below the waves
Near the anchors
—When keels pass vehemently rending
A new obstacle they overcome
And with all its dolphins hope shines
Gain of the sun in a human heart—
The nets of doubt draw out
A salt figure
Hewn with pains
Indifferent white
Turning the void of its eyes towards the sea
Supporting the infinite.

PANTELIS PREVELAKIS

POEM

Translated from the modern Greek by D. Capetanakis.

DEATH is frozen waiting at my door.
Open to him! Open the door!
Because I still have a soul in my breast!
This morning, as I was passing by, the cypresses
presented arms
and the wet earth longed for
the handful of my dust.
Let us open and receive Death!
Because I still have a soul in my breast.
The standing furrows that I ploughed
this year also expect my sowing

DONALD BAIN

TWO POEMS

DARK BACKWARD

EARTH, air, fire, water
Does not our life consist of four elements ?
For when the clouds press heavy on the window-pane
Comes remembrance of the passage of the past
And gentleness returns to earth again.
Then no longer whispers pity to the slaughter
But only mist and indolence remain.

Mountain, and sun on snow
With laughter in the air
And on the skin the glow
Of beauty in the glare.

There was peace in the quiet sunlight
And gentle melting of the ice from trees
And cigarettes in the afternoon.
There was a room that smelt of poetry.
Coming down in the dark after ski-ing
Under the pines, flickered a new ease
Where daylight brought vulgarity to secret night
But after hoped-for footfelt crunch came pity soon.

The sudden glory of forgotten speed
Twisting under a gentian sky
The stomach sickening to succeed
These no longer to deny.

TWO POEMS

Sun, air, and water on the earth
All joined in beautied elegance of ice.
And when the lake was gentle to the touch
Of bodies brazen by the blue
Of lake and sky and distant mountainside,
The sunlit glances through the wood were sacrifice.
In ever-suffering, everlasting birth
Of sleep, lie crouching mutilation or the crutch.

The joy of lithe reaction
The waking slumber after sleep
When dreams no longer lose direction
And phantoms wander from the deep.

The frozen joy must always melt
After the last steep train has sweated empty down
The fields, already patched with spring.
With winter went the agony of pleased fear
When speed was wasted on the spitting snow
Towards an inn whose room was heated body's drown
And with the spring comes piping down the valleys wild
Another song whose English woods new rivers ring.

Primroses in Devonshire
And primulas in Spain
No matter where the sea-gulls gyre
The pleasure is the same.

The memory of joy and pain is one
Both passively re-lived past comforting
The smell of ether in a sunlit room
As fierce as some new convalescent spring
The quiet rest of gentle bed or book
Or some old tune revolving on the gramophone.
These and the resting after pain, or well-remembered moan
Will mingle in the avenue before the boneless tomb.

DONALD BAIN

We are out of tune
Unless we know ourselves
Those who are immune
Dance upon the shelves.

The tread of feet on spring-time soil
And April rain, old music played,
These are the lasting after-fever
These the storm-tossed air's quick-quiver.
The rank canter of a tailless mare
May drive hard sorrow down the clamant glade
Swirling above the rise of new endeavour.

Autumnal kindness of the year
And thunder in the corn,
A German beauty above fear
In baroque church forlorn.

The noise of love is never dead,
Although the aching heart of wonder
Will break the steady wave of time
There will remain the vision in the evening
Of that first autumn of the war and love,
When sunlight lulled the afternoon of all the universe.
For though the words that mattered have been said
The agony and ecstasy return sublime.

The autumn and the springtime
The moon at Rottingdean
All were in the ringtime
The future unforeseen.

And now earth, water, air and fire
And love of love that lives
Fuse with these fragments to ensure the past
For all is new and even the future
Glimmers beyond the angry lightning of the mind
The lyric love, the pain and all it gives
Like sunlight on an evening spire
Lingers now with hope of love to last.

TWO POEMS

HOMAGE TO WILFRED OWEN

FEAR-FIRE flames down mind-deep
Fretfully while Earth shakes
Sole emblem man may keep
Where irritable machine-gun rakes.

Man-made engines murder mind
Few the birds that unheard sing—
While men grown old and weary find
Solace beyond song's crystal ring.

You died and broke your heart
But brave with passion's ache
Now calm-fear bears your part
With words no bomb can break.

JEAN HOWARD

PENSION BELLEVUE

THE first-class waiting room at Grenoble smelled of beeswax and cedar, like the Paris mosque. But the well-sprung chairs and sofas, the two enormous gold mirrors inclined from soft red walls reminded the solitary occupant of some provincial Assembly Rooms.

Marigold Timpson could see herself stretched out in one of the mirrors, remote, as if in a dark pool: swollen, banded leg, long emaciated figure, flopping yellow hair, eyes enormous with fatigue. A school-girlish hat on the covered dressing-case with its scarcely familiar initials.

Even the excited shrieks of trains ceased to startle her, the flies to worry her. She half-closed her eyes, indulging in the new sensation that she hadn't to lift a finger. Somewhere her husband was walking about finding the right place, making things all right. Her sleepless, aching limbs stretched into a warm Indian red calm. The room began to fill up. An officer settled himself upright to sleep. A family came in; balloons 'Aux Dames de France'; little boys with long, white thighs, sailor caps. Was anyone ever stupid enough to go and sit in the third-class waiting-room?

'La pauvre petite!'

Bending over her was a kind-faced woman in mourning, with a trembling goitre, attended by an old whiskered fellow who tilted his straw hat towards Marigold, not wanting to fuss her.

'How did the accident happen?'

'Simply, I burned myself on a glacier, madame. I burned myself in the sun. And now it's all swollen up.'

Marigold was quite restored enough to enjoy telling the tale, exercising her light charm on the first-comer. Some-

PENSION BELLEVUE

thing distinguished about being burned on a glacier. Her spirits revived with the fun of speaking French.

'I asked myself, is it possible for one's leg to swell up only with the sun? I thought myself poisoned, but no: the chemist who bound me up assured that the sun could do that. Specially when one goes very high. Yes, we were on our way to Chambéry, but I became quite ill in the street.'

The old man pulled his wife away.

Marigold saw Geoffrey's corduroy trousers. There he was, smiling all round, unhurried, collecting her things.

'We can't go on to-day, darling . . . I've got the name of a pension up on the hills.'

Her yellow hair flopped.

'My husband. Yes, that's just what he was saying. I shall have to rest. Hélas!'

But it was not Hélas. The idea of going on lying flat somewhere!

'Geoffrey! Not a taxi!'

But it was only twenty francs odd up to the hilly suburb, and soon they stopped outside the Pension Bellevue, a closed door in the wall. A bell tinkled as Geoffrey went in, followed by the solicitous taximan. After a long time they returned, and her husband carried her up the long, winding path, the stone terrace, a switch of yellow hair over his arm.

He put her down on a soft white bed.

'It's awful, sweetheart, they've only got two beds.'

She squeezed him and made a face.

'I shall never sleep!'

But after he had taken off her shoes and gone away—she had almost had to order him off—she sat up and swung her legs over the side. It wasn't really so painful. Only she had suddenly felt so tired, trailing about the streets, after the early, crazy ride down the mountain-side. She had suddenly felt exhausted with this new, practical existence in full sunlight, she who had lived most of her time in a world of fantasy, trying to make her surroundings as unreal as possible.

JEAN HOWARD

She swung her legs over the side, took off her jacket, smoothed her gloves together. And in the gesture her whole situation changed. Her new alias fell away, she was Miss Sellar, she was Mlle Sellar, she was sitting on a narrow white bed at schools, at pensionnats, at the homes of distant relations, at the end of buzzing journeys, not yet facing the effort of a new life. And as she prowled about the room, smelling of herbs, she tended a sentimental regret for her lost maidenhead.

For it was a maidenly room, a room to live in, with many cupboards, an easy chair, white fretwork shelves for books, yes, and a little screen round the wash-stand, of the same cotton as was pinned up behind the beds. Geoffrey would laugh when he saw that screen, but she thought she would rather enjoy washing behind it, just to tickle him. In fact she couldn't resist slipping off her clothes, disposing her possessions all over the room as if she meant to make a long stay, and then, cat-like, going all over her body at the wash-basin, tenderly, as if assembling part by part her old private self.

And the bed! She would sleep soundly for the first time after a fortnight of shared nights. Through the two wide windows she could see mountains with snow on them. There came the murmur of voices, scrape of chair on gravel. Warm wafts of lime and clover.

She didn't want to think of the sun, she didn't want to think of her husband. A girl in a bed of linen and herbs.

Before she was properly awake she heard someone calling 'Chocolat.' It made her wide awake, avid for chocolat and sticky cakes. She carefully reddened her lips, leaving the face white, the brown eyes still wide, surrounded with blue shadows.

In the warm corridors some of the doors were left open, and screens placed in the openings, so that the smells in the separate rooms, smells of fruit, china tea, toothpaste, smells

PENSION BELLEVUE

of feminine occupation, could run in and out of the rooms in the way women do when there are no men around. She was conscious of an almost conspiratorial femaleness.

Downstairs her feet echoed on the tiles as she peered through the glass doors, looking for someone to give her chocolat. At last from a long echoing distance someone came. A middle-aged woman humped to one side, who eyed her leg sympathetically.

‘Madame has need to rest herself.’

‘Yes, I must lie down in the garden and keep it up. Can I have some chocolat, out there in the garden?’

She resisted telling about her leg, she had to have that chocolat. No use asking for sticky cakes.

She let herself carefully down into a chaise-longue under a cherry tree. The woman brought the chocolat and she had the double pleasure of drinking it and telling her story again at leisure. When the woman had limped away, she relapsed into her cat-like repose.

She was in a large, sloping orchard, with a garden to one side. Under every tree groups of people sat or lay, a few reading, a few sleeping, but mostly talking, hands hanging in lassitude. The orchard was surrounded with little châteaux painted in gay colours. To the side of one a girl was beating mattresses. The energetic sound seemed out of order.

This place! It seemed to understand her fatigue, took it up with practised fingers, embalmed and consecrated it, and turned it from a shameful handicap into a state which was legitimate, almost pleasant.

As the breeze freshened, couples began to wander up and down the paths of the garden, regarding her with curiosity as they passed, leaning on one another’s arms. From time to time the bell tinkled, and every time Marigold expected her husband, but suspended her emotion till she should actually hear his step on the gravel. She knew he would come, she bathed herself in this certainty, so far it was the best thing about being married, for one who had known no such certainty since her childhood.

JEAN HOWARD

After repassing her twice, two girls stopped with such a look of interest that Marigold began again about the sunburn and the glacier. Her French was improving at every repetition. They sat down while she was talking, seeming glad to interrupt their walk. One was dark, covered with yellow fat, a *pélisse* drawn over her shoulders. The other, whom Marigold addressed, was cadaverously thin, with lank red hair swept languidly back from a veined brow. Her hazel eyes with their red-flecked irises seemed to search Marigold as one who has come from beyond walls. She nodded and smiled, a charming smile with protruding pointed teeth. She wanted to keep Marigold's attention, not to feel herself obliged to take her companion's arm and pace out their tour of the twisting paths. But after a while Marigold's eyelids lowered, her hair flopped forward, it was so exhausting to talk to them.

They got up and walked on. But she felt she was accepted into their company. She gave herself up again to the ministries of the garden.

As evening approached, the peaks took on a pink glow beyond the cherry trees, nearer objects went into greens and blues. The sound of a stream, the tinkling bell, a goat-like cough somewhere. . . . *Assise la fileuse au bleu de la croisée.* . . . What was there about the place?

When her husband found her she could hardly speak. She held on to his hand, and answered him with long, sighing breaths. Geoffrey found her enchanting in this mood.

'Geoffrey, what is it about about this place? No, it's perfect, but . . . there's something . . .'

She nodded her head, her flopping hair.

But when a loud bell clanged out, drawing from the shadows the creeping couples, when they were settled in the *salle à manger* with its *faux-breton* chairs, he couldn't help being influenced by her mood. The talk was so quiet, the spaces of polished floor between the single tables so great. Everyone except themselves and two old ladies and gentlemen sat at single tables. The old lady next to them had a

PENSION BELLEVUE

stopper with a glass tube in it, but he could never see what she did with it.

Outside on the terrace a woman was marching up and down with an old man in dark spectacles. Up and down they went, each time he touched a vine with his stick. He was a légionnaire d'honneur. She walked with her face up, listening perhaps for the birds.

Suddenly oppressed, Marigold broke into a giggle. But Geoffrey instantly hushed her with a grip, a shocked look. 'They'll think we're laughing at *them*.'

She squeezed his arm, loved him for his kindness. Soon, however, she had an excuse for laughing. The valet de chambre appeared in the doorway, grinning like a clown's stooge. Marigold was quite pleased to tell him about the leg and the glacier, at every sentence he laughed more, his two hands under his baize apron, they laughed together, she was so pleased to be able to break the atmosphere without hurting Geoffrey or the blind man. When he disappeared Geoffrey frowned after him.

'What a ridiculous fellow! He's always laughing. Did you notice, he was on the steps when we arrived? He had only to take one look at your leg, it made him laugh like an idiot.'

By twos and threes the guests disappeared into their chalets. The hunch-backed proprietress bade them good-night.

'This place!' whispered Geoffrey.

She nodded eagerly. 'There's something . . . ?'

He drew her indoors. 'It's getting on my nerves!'

They had some fun in the bedroom. Her business with the screen was a success. But when he turned out the light and she lay with her arms down her sides it seemed as though he wasn't in the room, as if there was no one between her and the people in the chalets.

Geoffrey had been quite good about the beds.

'Oh no, darling. My leg!'

He had even looked quite sad at forgetting it for an

JEAN HOWARD

instant. She heartened him by making him pull the beds together.

‘Then if it gets too awful I shall put out my hand.’

But she knew she wouldn’t. Just for one night to be M. Sellar again. To play at being alone just because one wasn’t—never would be again. To dream of being alone so as to wake. It would be useless to try to explain these curious sources of pleasure to Geoffrey.

Suddenly the goat-like cough sounded, quite close, from the direction of the hidden stream. The sound frightened her.

‘Geoffrey!’ She shot out her hand, touched his face.

‘What is it?’

‘Only a goat, silly precious.’

She was immediately reassured. She never doubted that it *was* a goat. He put her hand under his cheek and fell asleep.

But Marigold lay awake, straining for the sound of the cough. It went on and on, almost choking her every time. Her tired imagination formed an unlikelike picture of the animal struggling in the dark with its cough, too near the stream perhaps, lying in the damp grass. No one by to help. She had to put her head under the clothes.

The cough was the first thing she heard next morning. She jumped out of bed, forgetting her leg, and pushed open the shutters to the mountains.

‘Geoffrey—wake up! Please let’s go away. My leg’s quite well. Almost. I’ll have to keep it up.’

He was doubtful. ‘What’s the time? Yes, we’d have plenty of time.’

The question of time was now put in the background, a never-failing fascination to Marigold. To decide once for all that one had plenty of time, to know quite certainly that one could wash, dress, eat one’s breakfast, and arrive with five minutes to spare! Something she, who had never had a settled home, had never achieved in all her wanderings,

PENSION BELLEVUE

this mastery of time. She nodded her admiration, and began to collect her possessions from all the corners where she had stowed them yesterday, kidding herself that they would stay for a long time. Now she couldn't bear to stay one day.

She had to keep on reassuring him about the leg, and at last went into the garden, swinging her hat, leaving him to bring everything down, settle everything. New luxury, to set out on a journey, hands free, swinging one's hat!

The two girls were sitting by her chair. She felt a sudden compunction, a wish to press their hands when she said good-bye.

'You must rest'—said the red-haired one. The yellow dark one gave her a look, she fancied, of hostility. The red-haired girl patted Marigold's thin arm.

'You'll get fatter here,' she said. 'Yes, they always get one fatter here.'

She seemed to be saying it for herself.

'We're going away to-day,' Marigold spoke in a long, sighing voice. Talking to the girls made her unable to breathe.

The girl drew back astonished. 'To-day! But does your doctor——'

'I didn't go to a doctor. A chemist bound me up.'

'Yes that,' the girl passed her leg over with a glance. 'But does your doctor?—The one who sent you here?'

Marigold felt her strength going. She must get out of this place. No explanations. So complicated, somehow. But how?

Geoffrey was at the top of the steps saying good-bye to the proprietress. She seemed to be saying, surprised, hurt: 'Je regrette beaucoup, monsieur. Je regrette beaucoup. Mais——' He was shaking her hand, saying vaguely how nice everything had been, not understanding much. Smiling his warm smile, raising his hat, then running down the steps towards Marigold.

In a moment he had smiled all round, before the girls had time to rise, included them in a farewell, swept Marigold

JEAN HOWARD

away, and had her half-way to the gate. She looked back, and caught the red-lit eyes coming after them. Suddenly she heard the goat-like cough quite loud. It came from the direction of a winding path with a wooden shelter at the end. A young man propped up with pillows.

‘Geoffrey, it’s not a goat.’

He pulled open the gate and the bell tinkled, so that her remark was lost.

While he was helping the taximan with the luggage, she pulled his sleeve.

‘Geoffrey, it wasn’t a goat.’

But he turned round and gave her a smile so full of adoration, so shot with protection and warmth, that she could do nothing but stand there and return it.

MAURICE JAMES CRAIG

FOUR POEMS

SONG

UNDER the sycamores of Sind
Listening to the wailing wind
I heard the cobras in a row
Sing of where the monkeys go
When they feel their feline paws
Change tentacular to claws
And dark within them rises lust
To scrabble in the burning dust
To dig their parents' graves and wait
Tensely in the jungle state
For the family to pass
While they lie hidden in the grass
And oiled by juice of falling fruits
Sharpen their teeth on mangrove roots.

POEM FOR BURIAL

THE pictures in the gallery
Fade and are suddenly dark
The ancestors remember
The children in the park.

MAURICE JAMES CRAIG

Under the scarlet banners
The candles have burnt low
And down the cold stone pathways
The children come and go

Backwards and forwards reading
Marble and granite names
Till nothing shows in darkness
But gilded picture-frames.

WAR AT NIGHT

To strike out of this grating clash
A flash of fire to light the landscape,
Make capital from the uncertain flesh
Is never easy.

The hillcrests that it lights are far :
The war goes on inside the valley
Blank ruins floodlit by the glare of fear
Are never hazy.

The focus as the war goes on
Is thrown each night so surely nearer;
And least of all times when the war is won
Do clearer edges

Leap into lines of light, to flood
What good may lie beyond the mountains
What reservoirs may be of tranquil blood
Beyond those ridges.

IN A RAILWAY TRAIN

ONLY the eyes are kind
Praying behind dark lashes
Lonely in tangled meshes
Playing at let's pretend.

FOUR POEMS

Only the railway-lines
Move in the groove, while the mind
Stonily stands around
Proving its private means.

Arms relaxed on the rests
Above the galloping wheel
Swarm with faint fire, to tell
That love is alive in the wrists.

DONAGH MACDONAGH

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

My Grandfather was a quiet man to the day of his death, and a man for whom I always had a great respect. He wore a beard and a half-tall hat, and when he walked through the town everybody saluted him and said: 'Grand day, Mr. Gallagher.'

I never knew my Grandfather very well because my father had married out and had gone to live about fifteen miles away, but often on a Sunday he would yoke up the trap after dinner and set off for a visit. He nearly always loaded a sack of potatoes or turnips or a couple of chickens into the trap to take along as a present, the fact that Grandfather had plenty of all these necessities detracting nothing from the generosity of his gesture. When everything was ready he would send me off to open the yard gate and to close it after he had passed through. He would have my mother and my two brothers sitting safely in the trap and the door open waiting for my arrival. As soon as I had securely bolted the gate after us I would jump in and my father would bang the door of the trap shut and then rattle the handle to make sure it was properly closed. He always took his time on the road, believing firmly that he had more time than money, so it usually took us the best part of two hours, or even two and a half, to cover the fifteen miles of road.

Grandfather had a fine, big, ugly house with half a mile of drive leading up to it and maybe fifty trees of various kinds planted all around it ; his whole estate was surrounded by high stone walls built by one of the old landlords who believed that privacy was one of the first perquisites of an Irish country gentleman. As we drove up through the leafy avenue, my father skilfully avoiding the pot-holes which

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

experience had taught him to expect, the dogs, of which my Grandfather kept an inordinate number, would bark and run beside us, anxious to be first with the news of our arrival ; so that by the time the mare was resting outside the front door Grandfather would be standing there ready to receive us, his stick in his hand and a fine smile of welcome on his peaceful face.

We would all troop into the room and he would take down a bottle of whisky for father and himself and a bottle of sherry, which, on mother's polite refusal, he would replace without a sigh. After a few minutes of sitting on the stiff horse-hair sofa, the springy hair cutting our legs and the leisurely conversation wearing our patience, my brothers and I would slip quietly through the door and off out into the yard.

That is almost all I know about Grandfather. We hardly ever spoke two words together, and if he had met me on the road he might easily have passed me by unnoticed. He never did meet me on the road, but when we were leaving for home he always slipped a half-crown into my hand, and if I watched carefully I would see him do the same for my brothers. At Christmas he gave us a sovereign apiece.

As we grew older mother sent us to school to be educated, as she said, like gentlemen, so that we soon became distressed at Grandfather's lamentable use of what we had come to know as the King's English. His pronunciation often left us puzzled and disturbed, while his command of the elements of grammar was far from perfect. ' And how is every bit of yis this fine summer evening ? ' he would ask, a question which struck our Jesuit-educated ears as a distinct solecism. We could not help wondering what our school friends might think. What the boys at school might think seemed a matter of considerable importance at that time.

As we might have foreseen, had we looked so far ahead, Grandfather died one fine day and we were all brought back from school for the funeral. There were priests there from every diocese in Ireland, lawyers, farmers, merchants, and

DONAGH MACDONAGH

even a baronet, and we felt that the funeral was one of which the school might well be proud. The coffin was lowered into the earth amidst a storm of prayers to heaven, and afterwards some of the most distinguished figures in the county returned to Grandfather's house to drink his whisky and to speak nothing but good of the deceased.

'Your father was a strange man,' said my mother as we jogged home in the trap, 'and a very strange man,' she added. My father nodded his head, gave a pull at the reins and smiled round at all of us.

'Strange isn't the word,' he said, 'you don't know the half of it!'

'He was always terribly decent to us,' said Claude. 'I think the way he used to send us pocket-money to school was perfectly ripping.'

'He was a decent owl skin all right,' said my father, 'but you don't know the half of it. No, nor the quarter. Would you believe it, Claude'—he never liked that name—'would you believe it, if your grandfather hadn't murdered a man in the height of his fury you wouldn't know to-night that there was such a word in the English language as "ripping." 'Ripping,' I could hear him mutter, half vexed. 'Ripping, perfectly ripping! I say old boy!' The wind blew the sweetish smell of whisky back to me as he mimicked Claude's high-class accent. 'He was a great owl fellow all right, but a red-handed murderer into the bargain.'

'Please remember what you are saying,' said my mother, speaking with great decision and force, 'There is a time and a place for everything.'

'They may as well know it now as any time,' he said, 'and better from me than from a stranger, and the sooner the better. It will be awfully ripping for them to know all about it.' And he let out a big shout of laughter and gave the reins another pull. It was a cloudy, squally evening in late December with night just coming on. My father had lit the candles in the two lamps and they were beginning to throw a little light around the trap. I could see dimly his laughing

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

face and his eyes twinkling with malice. 'It may come as a surprise to you boys to know,' he said, 'that the ould boy was a murderer, aye! a regular out and out murderer and no hanky panky about it. The real Alley Daly.'

'I just can't believe it,' said Claude, and that was enough to set father going.

'My father,' said he, 'stood in a court of justice charged with the awful crime of murder. And he did it too. Aye, he did! He did. Do you want to know what happened?' He stuffed tobacco into his pipe, handing the reins to me to hold while he did it; then he leant forward and lit a match in his cupped hand, his face lighting up as he puffed at the pipe. He sat back, took the reins and gave a sigh. 'Do you want to know what happened?' he repeated, and as he spoke his accent became broader with every sentence, the slight American inflection falling away. It was like hearing Grandfather himself.

'My father, your Grandfather, the ould fellow we've just left in his lonely grave, was a small-holder in his young days, not two miles from here. Above opposite the church-yard. He had a five-acre farm and a little cottage and damn the thing else only a couple of cows, a pig or two and a few chickens. Himself and my mother were married three or four years, and though they were the grandest looking pair in the country they hadn't a sign of a family. Nobody could understand it at all. When the farm work wasn't too hard he used to do a bit of work on the roads, breaking stones, or spreading them, or clearing ditches or the like. I believe he was a fair devil for stone breaking, and a great man at the game. He had a pal called Peter Joyce, a fellow about the same age as himself who used to be on the road with him. A great man for the beer he was. Of course my da used to have a great mouth on him for it too before he got married, but after that he laid off it all right. Barring, of course, an occasional pint.

'Well, one fine night anyway, me bould Peter Joyce, Josie Conway and a lad called Jack Taylor were out on a terrible

DONAGH MACDONAGH

skite down in the local pub—Mulcahy's it was, we'll pass it a bit up the road here. They rambled in there about five in the evening with five or six shillings each in their pockets—that was a lot of money in those days. They started drinking porter and they drank till it came out in their eyes. They were sitting there drinking and talking and singing, telling stories and cutting the bowels out of every mother's son in the ten parishes. There wasn't a girl in the county could escape their tongues, and to hear them talking you'd think they'd seduced every woman this side of the river Shannon.'

'Jack!' said my mother, 'remember the children.'

'Ah, children hell!' said my father, and grunted. 'Right devils and wild characters they thought they were, afraid of neither God nor man, ready to fight the whole British nation and lepping to have a crack at it. A couple of times Josie Conway and Jack Taylor started off to have a sparring-match, throwing their caps on the floor and preparing to have a right set-to, but Peter Joyce and the barman managed to pacify them and then they'd all start singing and drinking again. A decent poor slob the same Peter Joyce by all accounts, a quiet decent man that never wanted to pick a fight with any man. All he wanted was to have his jar in peace and quiet with a bit of ree-raw to keep his heart up. A great man to sing a ballad he was, and a topping step-dancer. Bedamn it! I believe he was fit to lick the champion of Ireland at step-dancing, but it didn't get him very far in the heel of the hunt. Are you asleep there, Janey?' He never called my mother Janey except when he had had a few drinks, so she said in a very cold kind of a voice,

'As if I could get a sleep with all that silly talk.'

'Wrap yourself well up there and we'll be home in no time.'

'I wish you'd hurry, father,' said Claude, 'it is getting a trifle chilly.'

'Chilly,' said my father, 'chilly is it? What you want is a good bellyful of porter under your belt to keep you warm. Chilly is it? Man dear I'm like a furnace. Feel that hand!'

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

And he put his large, hard hand against Claude's cheek. 'Nothing chilly about that! Ah, dear God, it'll be many a long day till we see men again like my poor dead father that's lying cold in Coolnamara graveyard this night, may the Lord Almighty have mercy on his good-humoured soul! He was a great man if you like. A great earner and a great spender, and a great man to down a bottle of whisky. A man after my own heart, and he never crossed the threshold of a boarding-school in all his days. But do you know where he got his education? In the great University of life. And it'll be many a long and weary day till any of you fine gentlemen get even a pass degree out of that institution.' I could see that the good-humour was beginning to die in him, so I said quickly:

'But tell us, da, what happened to Peter Joyce and his pals?' Claude always infuriated him by calling him 'Father,' and once, after a long term at school, he tried 'Pater.' He got a back-hander that time that he didn't forget in a long while.

'Oh, Peter Joyce, the very man!' said my father. 'Now there was a man for you. A man that might be alive to-day only for the company he kept. He got into a drinking match with Josie Conway and Jack Taylor in Mulcahy's below here. I don't think we can have passed it yet. There they were sitting drinking the whole evening, drinking and chatting and telling stories, and singing.'

'This begins to sound painfully familiar,' said my mother.

'Fair enough! Fair enough!' said my father with some annoyance. 'Maybe you'd like to finish the story yourself?' And he began clucking to the horse and sucking his pipe very fiercely.

'I would never have started it in the first place,' said my mother, 'let the dead bury their dead is what I say.'

'Who's stopping them?' said my father. 'That's what I want to know, who's stopping them? But about Peter Joyce. The late Peter Joyce! In the course of all the discussion that was going on in Mulcahy's pub didn't the name

DONAGH MACDONAGH

of my poor father come up for review. He was married just about four years and had neither chick nor child to show for it. "What kind of man is he at all," says Josie Conway, "that he couldn't do better than that?" And one word borrowed another till nobody could find a good word to say about the poor man, though he was a friend of all of them. "He's wasting his time properly," says Jack Taylor, "breaking stones on the highway instead of tilling his own patch. Does he need a handy-man do you think?" And with that he called for another round and they all roared laughing, thinking it was funnier than the Empire Theatre in Dublin.'

'Anyway the time finally came when they all had to go home, and a terrible job Mulcahy had getting them out. They staggered into the fresh air and stood for a long time up against the gable-end of the house laughing and talking and singing and telling each other what fine characters they were, till Mulcahy put his head out the window and told them he'd have to go for the Polis unless they moved off out of that. Well, at last they got under way and off they went on the road home, singing at the tops of their voices, shouting in at every house they passed by, and trying to pick a fight with anyone they met on the road. As they came towards my poor father's house they began to remember all their talk about him, and they started to shout all kinds of dirty remarks when they saw a light in the window. My father was off down at the end of the haggard feeding a sick calf, but when he heard the commotion he came running up to see what was going on. "Is it a man you are at all, Gallagher," Conway was shouting, "or a sheep in sheep's clothing? Would you be needing any skilled labour in there do you think?" And they'd all roar laughing.

'Well, my father was a quiet, decent sort of a man that never raised his hand to anyone or ever got in a fight, but when he heard all this dirty blackguarding and knew that my mother could hear it inside, he caught Conway the father and the mother of a clout in the puss, that landed him

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

on the other side of the road. "Take that, you loud-mouthed drunken eejit!" says he, turning to look for the next man. It was black dark by this time and he could just see a figure in front of him, so he let out an almighty swipe at him that landed him on the back of his head against the stone wall. Off run the others like the hammers of hell, and down goes your man with the devil of a crack. There isn't another sound out of him only groaning something terrible and shouting *mile murder*. He doesn't make any attempt to get up, so my father gets a fright and goes over to him and strikes a match. He sees that it's Peter Joyce, and his head all covered with blood where he struck a sharp stone. "God, I'm murdered," says Peter to my father, so he starts trying to pull him to his feet, but every time he lifts him up he falls back again. After a bit my father starts to shout to the others to come back for God's sake, there's a man dying, and at last they do. The fighting and the night air have almost sobered them, but when they see the cut of poor Joyce they get as sober as a couple of Supreme Court judges in about five seconds.

'They all lift him up and carry him into my father's house and try to bandage him up as best they can, my mother heating water and crying. They put him lying on the bed and in next to no time the whole place is swimming in blood. There's the unfortunate fellow, delirious with drink and the crack on the head, shouting and roaring that he wants to go home to his da to die decent on his own bed. Instead of getting him comfortable and sending for the doctor, what do these born eejits do only hoist him up on a bicycle that's in my father's house, and wheel him home. Up they drag poor Joyce on to the saddle and with one of them on each side and my father darting round like a sheepdog after a flock of sheep, they set off for Joyce's, a matter of a mile or so down the road. Can you imagine that procession of fools? The dying man perched up on the saddle, two half-drunken clowns pushing him along by the light of a lantern, and my father running round in small circles, seeing the hangman's noose dangling before his eyes at every step he took.

DONAGH MACDONAGH

'They dragged along, with Joyce getting weaker and weaker till finally they turned in his own gate and got his unfortunate father out of his bed. The poor man let one screech out of him when he saw what they had, and they started off to apologize; but that was a lot of use to the man and his son half dead on him, with the blood dripping down the back of his neck on to the floor. Of course Conway and Taylor were half dead themselves by this time, with the dint of the drink and the fight and the sleep, so as soon as they dumped their pal on the bed they packed up, and off with them home.'

'I'm sure we've missed the road home,' said my mother sleepily, opening her eyes and closing them again quickly.

'And the devil a care I care,' said my father, 'if we've missed the road to heaven. Well, Joyce's father lit the death candle and himself and my father sat beside Peter all the night long, not but it was nearly the dawn by that time. Peter was hardly breathing at all, so as soon as it was day my father went off to get the priest and the doctor and the Polis. When he told his story in the barracks the Sergeant put him under arrest, just to make sure.

'Well, poor Peter Joyce died and there was a great to-do about the whole thing, and whatever mix-up there was my father was brought off to Green Street Courthouse in Dublin to be tried for murder. But as soon as the jury heard the story and all that dirty language that had been going on, and all the surrounding circumstances they acquitted him right away without a second thought. He had all the cuttings about the trial put away in a big scrapbook somewhere. I must show it to you some time.

'The cottage where my father and mother lived was right across the road from the churchyard here, and what does he find when he comes home after the trial only a bloody big tombstone that the Joyces of all Ireland have subscribed for, stuck up right outside his own front door. Now my father was always, as I said, a quiet peaceable man who never meddled in any trouble, but the sight of that stone

MY GRANDFATHER WAS IRISH

used to infuriate him beyond words. Every time he put his head outside the door there it was mocking him, and every time he'd see it it would put him in mind of the trial and the fight, and above all of the dirty words that Conway and Taylor and Joyce were going on with that night. So one fine day himself and my mother up anchor and off with them to America. As soon as ever he gets there his luck changes, he gets a job as a sand-hogger under the Hudson River, and pretty soon he's a builder's foreman, and then a builder, and that's how he started and made all that money.'

'And you're an American then?' I said.

'Me an American, is it?' My father spat rudely into the dark. 'I was born here and I hope to die here. But I did go to America when I was only a couple of months old. And that's the strange thing! Whatever queer way the whole thing affected my father and mother, they started in to have a family almost as soon as the trial was over. Six sons they had and five daughters. So maybe it was a lucky thing for all of us that those three boys got all that drink taken in Mulcahy's bar. Only for that none of us might be here in this trap to-night. And wouldn't that be a sad thing now?'

We all sat silent for a while, thinking of that possibility, listening to the leisurely trot of the mare. Suddenly my mother noticed the silence and sat up straight:

'Are we nearly home yet?' she asked.

'No,' said my father, 'but we're just about to pass Mulcahy's pub, the scene of our nativity.'

IN CHINA



HAROLD ACTON

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

FROM time immemorial the Chinese have delighted in stories and even in the most ancient philosophers, such as Chuang Tzŭ, we can find passages of pure imaginative fiction. The Emperor Jên Tsung of the Sung dynasty, who reigned from 1023 to 1056, is said to have demanded a new story to be told him every day, 'to amuse as well as to acquaint him with the morals and customs of the people.' But unlike *The Thousand and One Nights* these stories were brief and were therefore called *Hsiao-shuo* or 'small talk,' a name which has since clung to every kind of fiction, short or long. And the majority of old Chinese novels are exceedingly long. They were written in the spoken language of the time, and though some of them had millions of readers they were never considered as a branch of literature. The self-respecting *littérateur* of the old school regarded them, if at all, as an agreeable distraction: it was a sheer waste of time and talent to devote more than one's leisure moments to such trivialities. A scholar, for instance, who in one of his compositions should allude to any incident in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, though the most literary of Chinese novels and the nearest to actual history, would soon become the butt of all his colleagues. If he deigned to write fiction it was with some ulterior, personal motive, either to attack an enemy or to air a grievance: he had no æsthetic or commercial aims. To avoid compromising himself he would print it under some fantastic pseudonym. It was not until the beginning of the Manchu dynasty that picaresque romances were composed with a definite eye to profit.

The masses were constant in their demand for fiction: scorned by the man of letters, it became the province of

HAROLD ACTON

professional story-tellers. Most of these had scant education, but a gift for coloured narrative and an instinct for symmetry must have always been Chinese characteristics, for their tales are generally vivid and well composed. Their chief defect was a desire to show off what learning they possessed, which impelled them to weigh down their narrative with unsuitable quotations, allusions, discursions and chunks of unwieldy verse. Though this is recognized, we find similar qualities and defects in many contemporary Chinese writers, whose novels might also be improved by condensation.

The old-fashioned story-teller survives in the popular tea-house and market-place, and the modern writer is now attempting to compete with him. For a creative artist the problem is none too easy.

The new movement in Chinese literature is largely a result of contact with the West, and its pioneers received a modern, Western education. A Westerner may therefore approach it with greater ease than he could approach the Chinese Classics, and apply his own criteria to modern Chinese fiction without impertinence. But unless he has some acquaintance with the Chinese language he will scarcely appreciate the difficulties involved.

While classical Chinese was a remarkable medium for written communication between areas with widely different dialects, it could neither be spoken nor verbally understood. Classical school-texts had to be paraphrased and explained in the local dialects to become intelligible. With the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911, reformers began to look for a simpler, more suitable language as a means of popular education. At first sight what could be more appropriate than *pai-hua*, the common speech of the people, which is practically free from classical expressions? But there are numerous forms of *pai-hua*, and it was finally decided to adopt the most widely spoken *kuan-hua*, which foreigners translate as 'mandarin,' since it has long been the speech used by officials all over China, as distinct from the local dialects. To practise what they preached required more courage than

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

these reforming scholars possessed; and they could hardly demean themselves to write in a language they despised.

It was for a younger generation to experiment seriously in this form. A group of Peking National University professors composed the vanguard of the movement. *New Youth*, a monthly edited by Mr. Ch'ên Tu-hsiu, then Dean of the College of Letters, was their chief organ of opinion, and Dr. Hu Shih rose to fame on the strength of his provocative contributions to it. 'The three great principles of the Army of Literary Revolution,' wrote Mr. Ch'ên in 1917, were: '1. To destroy the painted, powdered and obsequious literature of the aristocratic few, and to create the plain, simple and expressive literature of the people. 2. To destroy the stereotyped and monotonous literature of classicism, and to create the fresh and sincere literature of realism. 3. To destroy the pedantic, unintelligible and obscurantist literature of the hermit and the recluse, and to create the plain-speaking and popular literature of a living society.'

As can be imagined, *New Youth* created a tremendous upheaval in the scholarly world, and violent controversies. There was a general outbreak of short-story writing comparable to that at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in England, when reputations were made by writing them. In China this was something new, for with rare exceptions the shortest of stories had been as long as the average French novel, discursive and loose in texture. This outbreak may have been partly due to reaction, but it was chiefly due to an instinctive realization that the form was particularly suited to Chinese talent, which either in poetry or prose had never expressed itself happily in *œuvres de longue haleine*. Concentration of style and economy of effect had always been the aim of conscious Chinese artists.

The first mature fruits of this exciting phase, which was one of reconnaissance rather than of renaissance, were some short stories by Lu Hsün. Strikingly unusual as his subject matter and technique appeared to his compatriots, a

HAROLD ACTON

foreigner will immediately recognize the Russian influence on Lu Hsün's work. His brief essays called *tsa-kan*, or 'random thoughts,' are reminiscent of Gorki's *Fragments from my Diary*; his short stories, of Chekhov. He has justly been compared to both these writers, yet he is no mere imitator: his whole outlook, his restraint, his irony, his subtle understatement and submerged satire, his humorous unsentimental treatment of gloomy, and even tragic, themes, are essentially Chinese. The Chinese, moreover, have a lyrical attitude towards Nature and a bitter-sweet humour so akin to the Russian, that the influence of the latter may often be exaggerated. If Lu Hsün picked up some of his thread from Chekhov he has certainly sewn a Chinese coat with it. This is clearly illustrated by two of his earliest stories, *K'ung I-chi* and *Medicine*, which first appeared in *New Youth* and have since been translated into English, albeit with injury to their 'sense, shortness and salt.' * *Medicine* is an attack on rural superstition—in this poignant and gruesome case a superstition prevalent in South China that human blood is a remedy for consumption. Executioners were wont to enjoy the privilege of selling the warm blood of their victims for a handsome profit, and *Medicine* tells of a poor couple who administer such a 'guaranteed cure' to their dying son with a pathetic baffled trust in its efficacy. The story ends among paupers' graves, 'so numerous and closely arranged that they remind one of the sweet buns laid out in a rich man's home for a birthday celebration.' The consumptive's mother is so touched by the grief of another woman that she almost forgets her own and goes over to comfort her. The latter implores her son's spirit for a sign that he is listening. There is a crow on a neighbouring tree. 'Let the crow fly here and alight on your grave!' she cries. And the two old women stand in the dry grass gazing at the crow, which sits on and on, as if cast in iron. After a long while they walk off and the crow suddenly startles them with a hoarse croak,

* In *Living China*, a collection of modern Chinese short stories compiled and edited by Edgar Snow, London, 1936.

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

flapping towards the far horizon. Everything is crystallized in a few vividly etched scenes; the dialogue is sparse and biting to the point. *Medicine* is very near to poetry: it haunts one even in an uninspired translation.

Lu Hsün's resemblance to Chekhov is more apparent than real. Temperamentally he is closer to Gogol, whose *Dead Souls* he finished translating just before he died. As well as a natural power of observation, he has that capacity to turn back with perfect naturalness of feeling to scenes of his childhood which struck Lafcadio Hearn as essentially Oriental. His subtlest effects; the deft, pointillistic tints of his miniature portraits, such as *K'ung I-chi*, the destitute pedantic old classical scholar whose legs are broken by the local magistrate for stealing books; the touches with which he can evoke the spiritual individuality of a nation; all are achieved by a gentle understatement and a lack of emphasis which defy the translator's efforts. His scalpel cuts at the very heart of Chinese apathy. Throughout his work he never forgets that he is a writer with a social message. In one of his prefaces he tells us that after studying medicine in Japan he came to realize that China's diseases were mental rather than physical. He returned to China to teach, first in his native province of Chekiang and then in Peking. But he is too fine an artist to be drearily all message, like Gorki in his later novels. Sardonic, sceptical, burning with anger against cant and injustice, he depicts—a Chinese Breughel with sombre Goyesque moods—the lives of poor country folk. One of his best long stories, for instance, *The True Story of Ah Q*, which has been translated into English, French, German and Russian, illustrates the mentality of most Chinese villagers at the beginning of the revolution, as well as the psychology of many townsfolk, rudely awakened from their dreams of an omnipotent Son of Heaven. Weichuang is a typical Chinese village—if not, as some have suggested, a microcosm of China. Until recently the Ah Q's were numerous; vaguely they existed and vaguely they died. But Ah Q's existence is lit by one flickering gleam: the long-suffering yokel has been

HAROLD ACTON

badly buffeted by the whole village and determines in a sudden rebellious mood to join the ranks of the revolutionaries. 'Of late Ah Q had experienced some hard knocks; in addition to this, during the afternoon he had gulped two bowls of wine on an empty stomach and had promptly become intoxicated. So he pondered this matter as he strolled along. He seemed once more to be soaring on airy pinions, and without so much as knowing how it happened, it appeared that the Revolutionary party was *himself* and that all Weichuang were his captives. In his excessive elation, he could not refrain from shouting: "Revolution! revolution!"'

But when the revolution reaches Weichuang, poor Ah Q is the first to be snuffed out, and his execution is a swift and pungent passage of irony. One is reminded of Gissing's devastating sentence: 'We only live our lives by laughing a little in the presence of suffering.' All Lu Hsün's writings abound in pathos, but a pathos that has been frozen, that glitters with sharp icicles. Who that has read it can forget his description of a crowd assembling to gaze at an execution, while the raucous voice of a boy persists in calling attention to hot dumplings? His attacks on selfishness and callousness are never tedious; the least substantial of his stories are salted with wit and steeped in insight with phrases like sweet-sour sauce.

The vernacular movement gathered momentum with the mass meeting of Peking University students on May 4th, 1919, to protest against the Versailles Peace Conference decision to hand over Germany's former possessions in Shantung to Japan, and against the pro-Japanese policy of a corrupt reactionary government. Public sentiment was all on the side of the students and the government was forced to capitulate. The students who had been arrested were set at liberty and three notorious pro-Japanese ministers were dismissed. This triumph gave Peking University an added prestige; a spate of periodicals began to appear in *pai-hua*, and in 1920 the Ministry of Education ordered that the text-

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

books for the first two grades in primary schools were to be written in the vulgar tongue, now dignified as the National Language of China.

It was natural that writers should separate into cliques, but in spite of their published creeds and manifestos, such organizations were very flexible. The 'Realists' formed a group called the 'Literary Research Society' which published a *Short Story Monthly* and *Literature*, both edited by Chêng Chên-to, the dynamic Dr. Johnson of the movement, and supported by the vigorous contributions of Mao Tun and his 'blood and tears' school. Mao Tun's long story, *Spring Silkworms*, and his trilogy, *Pursuit*, *Turmoil* and *Disillusion*, which describe the bankruptcy of China's rural economy, are the outstanding masterpieces of this school: they are ambitious, solid, carefully constructed piles of realism—the very antithesis of the inspired character-sketches and impressionistic landscapes of most Chinese writers. Mao Tun has exerted a powerful influence and should remain important to students of sociology. But apart from the value of his meticulous documentation, he is too heavy-handed to appeal to many Western readers. Chinese critics compare him rightly to Upton Sinclair, with whom he has much in common.

The 'Romantics' were led by Kuo Mo-jo, a spontaneous, impulsive and amazingly prolific novelist, poet, dramatist and archaeologist. For many years he was the leading spirit and editor of *Creation*, a monthly magazine which from about 1922-1928 had a larger influence and circulation than any other Chinese literary review and was supported by such well-known contributors as Yü Ta-fu and Chang Tzū-p'ing. The latter's cheaply sensational stories of amorous intrigues used to sell like hot cakes but were as void of literary merit as our own sexy magazine products. Yü Ta-fu, however, serves as a useful guide to the psychology of Chinese youth during that restless period. He has been called a decadent, but his quest of sensations was never sterile. As a student in Japan he was more preoccupied with

HAROLD ACTON

prostitutes than with political economy. Lacking robustness, extremely susceptible to feminine charms, he lived in a continual conflict between excitement and repression. Besides sexual torment, his consciousness of China's dismal plight made his existence more poignant than if he had stayed at home. His imagination became morbid, his outlook suicidal. It is difficult to disentangle autobiography from fiction in his writings. Many of his stories are interesting merely for the ache of adolescence they communicate: the landscape, the whole atmosphere, is flushed with it. Divorced from this and scrutinized as stories they are often faintly absurd. Because his wife has died of consumption at home the young student in *Silvery Death* takes to drink; eventually, on discovering that the only girl who can console him, a Japanese waitress, is engaged to be married, he drinks himself into a stupor from mixed motives of self-pity and revenge, and expires of cerebral congestion on the square before the College of Medicine, with a volume of Ernest Dowson's poems in his pocket.

When he returned to China, Yü Ta-fu's outlook became like that of T. S. Eliot's *Hollow Men*. 'In this world to-day,' he wrote, 'the blind are many; the clear-sighted few. They have ears but no eyes. They cannot distinguish between the clean and the foul. They only have faith in reputation.' But he was young and the apathy he sank into was partly pose or he would never have troubled to express it so intensely. If introspection was one of the maladies of Chinese society it proved a boon to Yü.

'My past—half my life,' he exclaimed, 'is a fragment of misery. When I recall it, it seems nothing but tears and sighs. Some time ago I still took a certain pleasure in this misery. I still had dreams to deceive and comfort me. To-day, not only have I stopped tasting this sweet bitterness, but even the last defence of a fool—to dream with eyes wide open—has also been snatched away from me by a pitiless fate.' And as if the Chinese language were not sufficient he breaks into English: 'I am a man truly superfluous! I am

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

therefore utterly useless to society and the world. *A superfluous man! A useless man!*'

Yü's writings abound in such passages and we may find plentiful parallels among the *pai-hua* poets of his generation. He depicts himself 'warts and all' and inclusively, sharing his own predicament, some hundreds of returned students, intelligent, hypersensitive, struggling and disillusioned. We must take their environment into consideration before we pass judgment on them; compared with ours it was chaos. Even so there were optimists and doctrinaire enthusiasts, and Yü satirized them in a story called *Blood and Tears*. For at that time he showed definite affinities with Taoist thought, in the same sense that Keats showed when he wrote: 'The only way to strengthen one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing.'

Yü Ta-fu wrote well under the lash of frustrated desire, but as soon as he abandoned introspection for left-wing politics his virtues of candour and innocence disappeared. His writings exerted a considerable influence during the twenties, especially those attacking 'the feudal institution of arranged matches,' sex taboos and fossilized conceptions of filial piety, but his pessimism has little appeal for the present, more constructive, generation.

The differences between these Romantics and Realists are really superficial; both the *Literary Research Society* and *Creation* shared a strong opposition to static feudalism and revolted against China's hoary ethical teaching. They wanted above all an independent China. Both Mao Tun and Kuo Mo-jo became fervid advocates of proletarian literature. 'Our literature,' wrote Kuo Mo-jo in 1925, 'must be pervaded by the spirit of the proletarian revolution. We writers of China must reach the masses, the barracks, the factories, and the very rank-and-file of the revolutionary army. We must create a literature that is realistic and that can fulfil the aspirations of the Chinese people.'

In spite of this determination revolutionary writers remained way above or beyond the Chinese masses. Though

HAROLD ACTON

they expressed themselves in *pai-hua*, their form and substance were too alien and exotic. Ninety per cent. of their readers were university and middle-school students. The man in the street preferred the traditional tales of magic and derring-do recounted in the tea-houses: he was quite satisfied with old-fashioned entertainment. And after a spell of the 'blood and tears' school one is bound to agree with him. Mao Tun's imitators were monotonously and mechanically dreary; they forgot the strong sense of humour of their race. Having little direct contact with 'life in the raw' or power of observation, their peasants and factory workers and rickshaw-pullers were mere pegs for a motley patched with rhetoric and ill-digested ideas. More important and influential than their fiction was their formidable activity in the field of translation. Dr. Hu Shih and Chêng Chên-to enabled young writers to concentrate on this work by granting them monthly allowances. Assured of a modest living they could produce original work besides their allotted tasks. Apart from translations, the period from 1927 to 1930 was one of intensified literary feuds. Suppression of Communism involved much tragic martyrdom and ephemeral leftist journals sprang up like mushrooms in Peiping and Shanghai. It is bewildering to pick one's way between their quarrels. First Lu Hsün is denounced as a reactionary; then he is elected Chairman of the League of Left Writers, whose principles—ruthless attack on the old ideology, etcetera—were not so dissimilar from those of Ch'ên Tu-hsiu. At this time the best *pai-hua* poetry appeared, in *The Crescent Moon*, a monthly of which Hsü Chih-mo was the moving spirit. Hsü had grown familiar with English literature at Cambridge, where Lowes Dickinson helped to make him conscious of his powers; after his return to China, where he became a professor at Peking National University, he took the students by storm. More than any other poet he 'introduced the Western rhapsody' into Chinese verse, and it was a tragedy for Chinese literature when he was killed in an aeroplane crash in 1932. Though *The Crescent Moon* was

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

attacked for 'ivory towerishness,' it introduced a number of brilliant poets and essayists like Wên I-to and Ch'ên Mêng-chia, conscious artists who believed that poetry should 'dance in fetters' and obey certain metrical rules. It also introduced a story-writer who is far from esoteric, the versatile Shên Ts'ung-wên, who produced over forty books before the age of thirty. In his early 'teens he was an army scribe in his native province of Hunan, and it was from his wanderings in China's 'Wild West' among the Miao-tzū and other strange tribes that he derived the experience that enriched him as a writer. Some of his stories have been translated, but it is hard to render justice to his fresh and picturesque idioms and vivid local colour.

Eventually all groups of writers buried their party hatchets in the common cause against the Japanese. Shortly before his death in 1937 Lu Hsün wrote: 'The problem for every Chinese to-day is how to preserve our national life. The only course is for our people to unite and drive out the invaders.' Political unity was achieved by the peaceful conclusion of the Sian Incident in 1936, and writers were quick to join the National Front. Mao Tun was their spokesman and prophet when he wrote in the *Literature* monthly: 'Our new literature is essentially a literature of national defence. It expresses the struggle of the Chinese people for their freedom, but it is not chauvinistic. True, it has hatred for the enemy invading our country, yet it has sympathy for the enemy soldiers, who are innocent folk driven to the front for cannon fodder. But not only sympathy for them. We must kindle them with our brotherly sincerity and enthusiasm so that they can stand up beside us and we can fight our common enemy together. We shall ruthlessly attack the traitors who serve the foe and we shall urge the people to exterminate them.' A mass meeting of writers was held in Hankow, then provisional capital, on April 27, 1937, and 'a resolution was passed for the immediate formation of a union of all writers so that all could work more systematically and effectively for the common cause. A

HAROLD ACTON

committee was elected and the Federation of Chinese writers thus established. With headquarters in Chungking, the Federation has branches in all the larger cities and hundreds of members all over China.'

When war broke out many publishers closed down, but the writers soon combined to issue their own publications. Mao Tun and Pa Chin brought out a new weekly called *Outcries*, Hu Fêng a monthly called *July*, the two playwrights Shêng Chi-yü and Hung Shêng a magazine called *Light*. Several newspapers began to print literary supplements. The first and most influential of these was the *Ta Kung Pao's*, edited by Hsiao Ch'ien, a story-writer of talent, to whom I am indebted for much valuable information. Writers became men of action, went to the front to drive lorries, wrote letters for the wounded in hospitals, taught refugees in camps. Pien Chih-lin and Ho Ch'i-fang joined the Eighth Route Army, and it is difficult for one who knew Pien as a fragile figure, the pale, shy, and bespectacled translator of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Gide, Virginia Woolf and Strachey's *Queen Victoria*, to visualize him enduring the rigours and privations of the campaign against the Japanese. The war has not ousted everything else from their attention; on the contrary it has strengthened and canalized their creative impulse. They continue to write, refreshed and invigorated by their experiences. Under the pseudonym Hsüeh Lin, Pien has produced some short stories which are symptomatic of the new trend; while they contain a 'message' they are written with all his innate concern for style. A translation of one appeared in *Life and Letters*; it begins characteristically: 'All of a sudden the village of An-chü was put out of countenance. The women promptly discarded their red trousers.' These red trousers are the keynote, as of a painting by Manet. Pien Chih-lin remains a subtle impressionist, but his palette has become more vivid in the Sino-Japanese thunderstorm.

The war scattered writers all over China and brought them into natural contact with the people; instead of viewing them

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

as abstract masses from some literary laboratory in a Shanghai skyscraper, they saw them in huts and in the open air and perceived their intellectual wants at first hand. Some carried on their activities just behind the Japanese lines; others tramped to far-off towns in the provinces. The chief universities of Peking and Tientsin had trekked to Ch'angsha and from there to K'unming, and the importance of literary students who could do Propaganda was generally recognized. Most of these students spent their time between bouts of schooling and guerrilla work. As William Empson wrote in a too-brief article: 'You normally have an experienced sergeant over a group of fifty to two hundred men, but they need a man who can read messages and make political speeches, supposed to be of equal rank to the sergeant, and he is normally drawn from university or failed-university young men.' In the meantime new literary magazines appeared in Hankow, Canton, Kweilin, Sian, Ch'angsha, Ch'engtzu, Yen-an and K'unming. A catalogue of their names would bewilder the Western reader. There was even a literary revival in Shanghai, that hornet's nest of Japanese terrorists and Chinese traitors, where Ch'eng Chên-to still pursues his voluminous research work. In fact China's Renaissance may truly be said to have begun with the Sino-Japanese War. The pioneers of the *pai-hua* movement were conscious artists with a narrow public of students and intellectuals. But since the war modern writing has had an increasing circulation, and the interest in recent experiments is widely diffused among an altogether different class of readers, including Government clerks, post-office employees, soldiers of the Central Army (the majority graduates from Middle Schools), policemen—many of whom have literary aspirations. The vogue of the short-story is expanding and the writers are in closer touch with their public. The magazine *July*, for instance, printed a moving sketch called *The Third-rate Gunner*, by a soldier writing under the pseudonym S.M. This brief study of a patriotic but pathetically clumsy peasant who is goaded into vindicating himself

HAROLD ACTON

as a shot by the insistent mockery of his companions, enjoyed a sensational success. Finer than this is Yao Hsüeh-yin's *Half a Cartload of Straw Short*, which deals with a similar theme and has obvious affinities with Gorki at his best. One of the most promising younger writers, Pai P'ing-chieh, whose *Along the Yünnan-Burma Road* (*Folios of New Writing*, Spring 1940) is a robust firm-footed evocation of the builders of that highway—'the workers in the rear who carry on the war'—is a pure descendant of the Miao, the 'aboriginal' tribe of Yünnan. The influence of Russian fiction is as powerful as ever, and in some stories so strong as to make them read like clever parodies.

Writers who were born about 1907 are already described as belonging to the older generation, and of these Chang T'ien-yi has gone from strength to strength. *Mutation* was one of the best stories in Edgar Snow's collection, to which Chang contributed an interesting autobiographical sketch. 'The characters in my stories,' he confesses, 'are taken from my friends, relations, and those with whom I have had frequent contact. Formerly I had the weakness of making my characters act merely for the sake of bringing out the themes of my stories, thus neglecting their complex human natures. Recently I have attempted to correct this mistake. I shall remember the necessity for 'creation of types' and learn to do it.' In *Mr. Hua Wei*, a satirical exposure of the cant and opportunism of many a pseudo-patriot, Chang T'ien-yi has drawn a universal type with a Chinese economy of effect which does not evaporate in translation. The only English writer who has influenced him is Dickens, and his dialogue is strongly humorous as well as realistic. But one of his finest stories, *Hatred*, a translation of which has already appeared in *New Writing*, has a harsh and mirthless poetry, a terror and sorrow new to contemporary Chinese writing. One can only compare the accumulated, concentrated force of this story to a masterpiece of Chou bronze. In his exploration of language and human behaviour Chang T'ien-yi

SMALL TALK IN CHINA

has mastered and moulded his discoveries as few others have succeeded in doing.

The danger of war to writers is that they may become too easily satisfied with slick and promptly effective reportage. The work of modern Chinese writers betrays a tendency to mistake mere anecdotes and snapshots, good in themselves, for self-sufficient stories. It would be excessive to demand gem-like distinction at such a time. The material, however, is magnificent, and among much mud and blood are plenty of gems which only need to be polished.

From a distance Lu Hsün still dominates the scene.

CHANG T'IENT-YI

MR. HUA WEI

Translated from the Chinese

IF I had cared to look through the family records closely enough, I suppose I might have found that he was a distant relation. But I always called him Mr. Hua Wei. And he objected to this title.

'Brother T'ien-yi, you're too . . .!' he said. 'Why is it you always call me "Mister"? You should call me "Brother Wei," or, if you like, "pal Wei."'

When he had settled this matter all over again, he put on his hat and said:

'We'll gossip together some other day, Brother T'ien-yi. I often wish I could talk with you to my heart's content but, alas! time never permits. To-day, you know, Magistrate Liu wants to see me. He has drawn up an outline of work for the office staff to do after hours, and he insists that I give him my advice and correct his draft. Then at three o'clock I must attend a meeting. . . .'

Here he shook his head in an aggrieved manner and smiled bitterly. He had told me a good many times that it was not that he could not bear hardships—and in war-time everyone must make sacrifices—but, in all justice, one's responsibilities should not exceed the amount of time at one's disposal.

'Mr. Wang, the Committee man, has sent me three telegrams urging me to fly to Chungking for an urgent official conference. Now, tell me, how in God's name can I leave my duties?'

Then he shook hands with me hastily and hurried out to his private rickshaw.

He always carried his handsome leather portfolio with

MR. HUA WEI

him and never forgot his heavy black walking-stick. On the ring-finger of his left hand he wore a thick gold wedding-ring. And whenever he was smoking a cigar, he would arch the ring-finger and extend the little finger, as though his hand were an orchid in full bloom.

In our town the rickshaw pullers never went very fast. They always dragged them slowly as though they were taking an after-supper stroll. But the private rickshaws were a different matter. Ding-dang. Ding-dang. Ding-dang! They flew like sparrows. Lesser folk had to make way for them; wheelbarrows went into the gutters; pedlars hastily pulled back their wares, and the poor pedestrians looked in terror for the nearest refuge.

The bell on Mr. Hua Wei's rickshaw rang loudly; the steel spokes on the wheels flashed in the sun, and before you could clearly see him he had flown into the distance.

And, according to the statistics of the few national salvation volunteer helpers who were interested in such things, the fastest private rickshaw of all was Mr. Hua Wei's.

You see, time was extremely important to him. As he once told me, in all seriousness: 'I am thinking of cutting out sleep at night. If only the day had more than twenty-four hours! Alas! the national salvation work is so formidable.'

And he would hurriedly glance at his gold watch. Then the muscles of his round face would tighten; his eyebrows knitted and lips pursed out. He would take leave as fast as his heels could carry him—he must go on to the meeting of the Refugee Relief Association.

He was always late. Everyone else had come long before and was waiting. As he left his rickshaw he would tap the bell once with his foot—ding!

Then everyone looked at each other. So Mr. Hua Wei had arrived. Some sighed with relief, while others pulled long faces and stared stupidly at the door. One fellow even clenched his fists and glared around him as though he wanted to pick a fight.

And there was Mr. Hua Wei. He came in wearing a very

CHANG T'IENT-YI

solemn expression, and walked with heavy, deliberate steps. It seemed as though all the strain on his face had merged into this awful seriousness. He halted at the door for a moment so that everyone might have a good look at him—apparently he meant to inspire all with confidence and assurance. He nodded knowingly to himself, his eyes on the ceiling. Thus he let the humble masses know that he recognized their presence.

Complete silence in the room. The discussion was about to begin. Someone was turning over some papers.

Mr. Hua Wei ceremoniously took a seat in a corner of the room quite far from the chairman's platform. Not a word. He would sooner not act as chairman.

'I cannot be the chairman.' He waved his hand with the cigar held daintily between his fingers. 'The Executive Committee of the Workers' National Salvation Association is holding its meeting to-day, and then there is a discussion meeting of the Popular Literature Research Society. I have to be present at both. Besides, I must see how the work is progressing in the Service Corps for Wounded Soldiers. You know well, I am sure, that my manifold duties completely occupy the limited time at my disposal. Actually, I have only ten minutes to spend with you here. I cannot be the chairman. I propose Comrade Liu as chairman.'

As he finished speaking he smiled and tapped the arm of his chair with his gold ring.

While the chairman proceeded with the report to the Committee, Mr. Hua Wei was busy relighting his cigar. He seemed quite preoccupied—as though he were counting.

'I have a proposal to make!' he called out loudly. 'Our time is very precious, and I propose that the chairman make his report as brief and concise as possible. He shall be allowed only two more minutes.'

He busied himself with his cigar and his watch, and when the two minutes were up he rose suddenly and waved his hand at the babbling chairman. 'That'll do, that'll do. Although the chairman has not yet finished his report, I

MR. HUA WEI

understand the essentials clearly. Now I must hurry on to another meeting, but I wish to make a few suggestions before I leave.'

Then a long pause. After a few thoughtful puffs of his cigar, he glanced at the audience.

'My suggestions are very brief. There are only two points I wish to make.' Then he smacked his lips. 'The first concerns ca'canny. I must urge that everyone work very energetically. I shall not over-emphasize this point. All of you are good people and enthusiastic about your work. I thank you very much. But there is another point which you must constantly bear in mind. This is my second point.'

Then he sucked twice at his cigar and let the smoke roll gradually out of his mouth. He lighted another match.

'The second point is the need of direction and guidance. You young people require guidance! The national salvation work can only be well performed when there is good direction. You young people are very enthusiastic in your work; but you lack experience, and consequently it is very easy for you to make mistakes. Unless you have direction and guidance the results can only be hopelessly bad.'

He quickly scanned the expressions of his audience and the strain on his features seemed to relax. He smiled and then went on:

'I can be very frank with all of you young comrades. I don't have to go through any hypocritical formalities. Indeed, we are all engaged in national salvation work and formality is not required. I thank you for it. That's all I have to say to you to-day. Sorry, I must be going.'

So he put on his hat, caught hold of his portfolio and stick, and after peering at the ceiling for a moment and nodding a few times to himself, he marched out, his stomach jutting well out in front of him.

But when he reached the door he appeared to have forgotten something he wanted to say. So he called the chairman aside and whispered:

CHANG T'IENT-YI

'Do you feel there is any ca'canny in the work?'

'I . . . I was just going to report that we . . .'

Mr. Hua Wei pointed his thick forefinger at the chairman's chest: 'Well, well, I know, I know that. I've no time to talk with you now. Later on, whenever you hit upon a plan, you may call on me and I will discuss it with you.'

One young man sitting near by stared at this conversation, and at last he could keep silent no longer. He put in: 'We called on you three times last Wednesday and you were out every time. . . .'

Mr. Hua Wei scarcely glanced at him as he said through his nose: 'Well, many things engage my attention.' Then he went on whispering to the chairman:

'In case you find that I am not at home, you had better discuss the matter with Miss Huang. Miss Huang knows my policy. She can tell you what to do.'

Miss Huang, you see, was his wife. But he always referred to her as 'Miss Huang' before other people.

Having settled all these problems, he stepped into his rickshaw and was borne to the meeting of the Popular Literature Research Society. Here he found that the discussion had already begun and somebody was talking. He sat down, relighted his cigar, and then tapped sharply three times on the chair arm to show his irritation.

'Mr. Chairman!' he called out. 'As I must hurry on to another meeting to-day, I cannot remain with you long. I have a few suggestions to propose and would like to do so before I take leave.'

Then he offered the Society two opinions. First, he pointed out that all the members present were cultural workers and that since cultural work was very important at the moment, all should work hard. In the second place, he said, all cultural workers should have direction so that they might be better unified and greater solidarity achieved.

At 5.45 he went on to the meeting-rooms of the Workers' National Salvation Association.

MR. HUA WEI

This time his round face beamed and he even nodded to one person.

‘Sorry, very sorry. I have missed three-quarters of the meeting.’

The chairman smiled at him. And Mr. Hua Wei stuck out his tongue as though he were a naughty urchin before a severe mamma. He looked round at the audience for a minute before choosing a seat next to a little man with a moustache.

In a nervous and solemn tone he whispered to his neighbour:

‘Did you get drunk last night?’

‘Thank God, I was only a little dizzy. How about you?’

‘As for me, I shouldn’t have drunk those last three cups.’ He spoke with great earnestness. ‘Especially that Shansi wine. One can’t take much of that. But Magistrate Liu forced me to drink—alas! I fell asleep as soon as I got home. Miss Huang said she would settle accounts with Magistrate Liu for making me drunk. Just think of that!’

Then he opened his portfolio and, taking out a slip of paper, hurriedly scribbled a few words and handed it to the chairman.

‘Please wait a minute,’ the chairman interrupted the speaker. ‘Mr. Hua Wei has to leave on other business. He must give us his advice first.’

After nodding his head several times, Mr. Hua Wei stood up.

‘Mr. Chairman!’ A deep bow. ‘Ladies and gentlemen!’ Another deep bow. ‘I beg your pardon. I arrived late and must now leave early . . .’

Then he made his suggestions: he stressed that this Executive Committee was the leading group in the town, and that it must always give direction and guidance to the work of other societies.

He further explained that the masses were very confused, especially the masses of to-day. Unless ‘we’ gave them direction and guidance the future would be very black. In

CHANG T'IENT-YI

fact every part of the National Salvation work needed leadership and 'our' burden was really very heavy indeed, but 'we' did not fear hardship and therefore must shoulder the burden.

He reiterated this importance of having leaders and direction. Then he put on his hat and left for another meeting. Every day he was thus engaged, going from meeting to meeting or attending dinner-parties.

Whenever I met Mrs. Hua Wei she would complain of her poor husband's innumerable tasks. 'The poor man! It is such a pity. He is so busy that he has not even time to take his meals.'

'Couldn't he drop some of the work and just concentrate on a single job?' I asked her.

'How could he do such a thing? All the work needs his guidance, you know.'

But it must be admitted that Mr. Hua Wei was taken by surprise on one occasion. The women of the city had organized a War Orphans' Relief Committee and they had not asked him for guidance or direction. As soon as he discovered who the sponsors were he brought them to his house and said:

'I know that you have organized a committee. I think you should select a few more members.'

When he saw them hesitate he added:

'I am wondering whether your committee can direct its work. Can you give me a guarantee that there are no undesirable elements on the committee? Can you guarantee that you will not make mistakes? Can you guarantee these things? Can you? If so, sign your guarantee on this paper for me. Later on when you make mistakes, you yourselves shall be held responsible.'

Then he hastened to declare that all this was not his idea, of course. He himself was merely an executive. His finger pointed at the chairman's chest:

'If you cannot do what I have just said, your organization is not a legal one.'

MR. HUA WEI

Having expressed himself in this manner two or three times to the committee, he was elected a member of the War Orphanage Institution. Consequently at every meeting of the committee, Mr. Hua Wei was present for five minutes, spoke a few words, and then mounted his rickshaw with his portfolio and stick and rode away.

One day he invited me to dine at his house because he said someone had presented him with some winter salted pork from the country. As soon as I arrived I could see that he had lost his temper with two young students.

'Why did you not attend the meeting? Why?' he was bawling. 'I told you to urge some of your friends to accompany you. But when I got on to the platform to make my speech—you!—you were absent! I wonder what the hell you were doing!'

'I was at the meeting of the newly organized Society for the Education of Refugees,' said one.

Mr. Hua Wei jumped up in consternation.

'What! What is that? A newly organized Society for the Education of Refugees! Why haven't they told me? Why wasn't I informed?'

'We had decided to invite you. But when we called at your house you were always out.'

'That'll do! So you are plotting in secret, are you!' He glared at his guests. 'Tell me truthfully what the purpose of your Society is. Now tell me the truth!'

This made them angry and they said: 'What do you mean by our "purpose"? We're all citizens of China. What do you mean by "secret plotting"? You never attend a meeting on time. You never stay through a meeting. When we call on you, you are always out. We cannot stop our work just on your account!'

Mr. Hua Wei flung his cigar on the floor and beat the table with a heavy fist—bang!

'You sons of bitches!' He clenched his teeth, his lips were quivering. 'Be careful! You—you!' Then he threw

CHANG T'IENT-YI

himself on the sofa, cursing: 'You goddamned sons of bitches!'

Five minutes elapsed. Then he timidly raised his head and peered round the arm of the sofa. The two men had gone. He uttered a deep sigh:

'*Ai-yah*, to think, brother T'ien-yi, what modern youth is like! Just look at them!'

That evening he drank too much wine, and muttered curses on the two unfortunate students. He became so violent that he smashed a teacup. As Miss Huang supported him on his way to bed he suddenly shuddered:

'There's another meeting at noon to-morrow. . . .'

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

Translated from the Chinese

‘Look at that fellow! He’s a regular Half Cartload of Straw Short.’

In our workers’ guerrilla brigade ‘Half a Cartload of Straw Short’ was the most common oath. If the commander hid his cigarettes in his pocket and refused to pass them round, we shouted: ‘Hey, Commander Half a Cartload of Straw Short!’ Or if someone sneezed loudly and then wiped his fingers on his sleeve, we said sarcastically: ‘You Half a Cartload of Straw Short.’

Lice and the Japanese devils were equally our foes. During drill periods we would scratch and try to crush the vermin under our clothing. But when we were off duty, that was a different matter. We would sit round a blazing fire, take off our clothes and dangle them over the flames. Then our enemy met his end. The lice swelled up like roasted sesamum seeds and dropped into the fire. And we would jump for joy and slap each other on the back over our victory, shouting:

‘Half a Cartload of Straw Short, hurrah! Nibble it with your teeth!’

In short, we used ‘Half a Cartload of Straw Short’ to ridicule anybody and everybody, never caring whether the usage was proper or not. But there was no harm meant—we used it so often as it was almost the only joke we had. Without it our life would have been as humourless and dry as the winter hills.

We gave the name to anyone, but the original ‘Half a Cartload of Straw Short’ had left our troop long before. And he certainly was an original character. From the time

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

when as a farmhand he joined our troop until he was carried off unconscious on a stretcher, we reckoned him our best comrade.

None of us could forget him. Even our commander treasured Half a Cartload's old pipe as though it were a love-letter from his sweetheart. You see, Half a Cartload of Straw Short never appeared without his pipe, and it made no difference to him whether there was tobacco in it or not. He would wander off alone and squat under a tree, his pipe in his mouth, wrinkling his brows as he gazed beyond the rolling fields. Sometimes he would pull at his pipe automatically and then two spirals of grey smoke drifted slowly out of his nostrils. Standing around, we would ask him :

'Is it your wife again, Half a Cartload? Still thinking of your sallow-faced woman and the kid?'

He would flush and then stammer: 'Why shouldn't I? It's been a long spell since our commander has told me where they are.'

According to him, our commander was omniscient; and his failure to tell the whereabouts of Half a Cartload of Straw Short's family could only be due to his apprehension that our volunteer would desert in order to join them. But Half a Cartload did not always daydream about his wife and home—more often he longed to return to till the rich land.

'Look,' he would point, 'how thick the wild grass is growing in the fields! Eh?' And he sucked his pipe profoundly, puffing out the last part of his sentence with a great cloud of smoke. 'The Japanese are the cause of that. Before, people could live and work in peace. Then the wild grass never grew rank.'

Cleaning the corners of his eyes, he would bend over the earth and pinch up a bit of soil between his fingers. Feeling its texture between his thumb and forefinger, he would carefully examine, taste and sniff it. Then he would nod to himself and murmur:

'What richness! How rich the land is!'

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

Half a Cartload of Straw Short could never succeed in learning even one patriotic song. Once he attempted to sing in chorus with the rest of us ; but as soon as he croaked out the first line we all exploded and laughed until the tears came to our eyes. After that he refused to sing another note. He merely smiled, with his pipe in his mouth, keeping his bloodshot eyes on our singing faces. Yet he knew two simple lines which he had learned in his boyhood—and these he always sang whether marching or camping, whether merry or sad :

‘ When we depart from our metropolis,
It either blows or pours. . . . ’

It happened like this. One frosty evening all of us rushed out into the courtyard. We crowded round our commander, trying to catch a glimpse of a newly-captured traitor. This unfortunate creature was securely bound and fettered. His face was deadly pale and his body was quaking all over. On his head was a brown fur cap, and a sickle and pipe were sticking into his belt.

Our commander was standing sternly by, holding a little ‘ sun banner ’ (Japanese flag), which he had found on the prisoner. We stamped our feet and shouted : ‘ May the devil take him ! See how he has disguised himself as a farmhand ! ’

‘ Shooting’s too good for the traitor ! ’

Somebody kicked him, and he immediately slumped to the ground and lay like a paralytic at the feet of our commander. Such a display of cowardice was too much for us, and some said : ‘ Ha ha ! this fellow’s nothing but a heap of duck-shit ! ’

But our commander was unmoved by this shameless spectacle. He continued to stare coldly at the traitor, determined to get more information.

‘ Your lordship,’ the wretch pleaded, ‘ I am an innocent man. My name is Du-Du-Dumb Wang—everyone knows me by that, everyone—— ’

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

'Is it your "small name"?'¹ I could see the hair on our commander's cheek twitching.

'Yes, your lordship. My father it was who gave me this little name. He was not an educated man, and he gave it to me with the purpose of warding off devils.'

'Then what is your big name? Stand up and say!'

'I haven't one, your lordship.' Poor Dumb Wang was so worried by this that he sobbed. 'My father said that a farmhand never goes to school, never sits in a lord's reception-room, and therefore doesn't need a formal name.'

'Then what are you called?'

'Oh, Half—Half—your lordship, Half a Cartload of Straw Short.'

'Eh?' Again the hair on his cheek quivered. 'What is it you are short of?'

'Half a Cartload of Straw Short, your lordship.'

'To whom do you owe it?'

'That's what people used to call me,' Dumb Wang replied with a blush. 'The name was given me by pock-marked Wang because he was always repeating in idle chatter that I was a good-for-nothing loafer.'

'Ha! ha!' We could contain ourselves no longer, and everyone roared with laughter.

But the commander did not laugh. He continued to question the traitor.

'I live in Wang-chuang village,' Dumb Wang stuttered, 'in the big Wang-chuang, not the small one. Then the damned "Northern troops"² arrived. They insulted our women and shot and beheaded the men. My woman said: "Let's move away now that all the others have gone. In a peaceful place we would be happier, even if we can only get water for food."

'So we left the village—my son Little Puppy, my woman and I. Now it's two days since she has tasted rice and

¹ Chinese peasants give their young children a temporary name, as uncomplimentary as possible, in order to ward off devils and thus enable the child to mature successfully.

² The Japanese.

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

water, and her stomach is as empty as a dry pouch. Yet our Little Puppy's still crying for her breast, though he has drained it of all milk.'

At this our bound prisoner dropped his head as two streams of tears went rolling down his face. The commander said in a deeper tone :

' Tell me briefly, why have you got that " sun-banner " ? '

' Your lordship, my woman said : " Look here, in time of war like this we may starve and die any time. But our child must live. We must look after him. Why should Little Puppy die, who is innocent ? " And so my wife spoke up again : " Go back to the village and dig up some carrots in the fields so that the baby can have some food to keep alive on." In the morning I went back to my village. But as I drew near some accursed soldiers with fur caps on their heads started shooting at me all of a sudden. I ran back. When I reached our hut I saw Little Puppy sobbing on his mother's breast.'

And Wang himself now sobbed convulsively.

' Don't weep ! ' our commander ordered. ' So that's how you became a traitor ? '

' The devil take a traitor ! If I was one, your lordship, the heavens would fall on top of me ! ' Jerking his shoulders, Half a Cartload of Straw Short excitedly went on : ' Some people say that the " Northern soldiers " won't attack you if you have a " sun-banner " in your hand. So my woman gave me the flag ; she had made it herself. " Don't waste any time," says she, " but be off, and come back quickly." Then I asked her : " Won't it be dangerous to have such a cursed thing in my hand if I meet the ' Southern troops ' ? " " They are Chinese like us, you blockhead ! " Being Chinese, your lordship, why should I become a traitor ? My woman be damned for advising me to take the flag ! '

He stared at the commander, who was clenching his teeth. A few more questions and the officer's features relaxed ; with a smile he ordered us to unbind the prisoner. As soon as he was free, Half a Cartload of Straw Short blew

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

his nose with his fingers and stooped to wipe them on his shoe. I noticed at once that he had on a rather new pair, both of which were smeared with dried mucus that shone in the light.

‘From now on, don’t call those Japanese devils “Northern troops,” understand?’ the commander explained in a friendly voice. ‘The present situation is quite different from the past. There are now only two armies—the Japanese and the Chinese. Do you see what I mean?’

‘Of course,’ he nodded; ‘I am not a good-for-nothing.’

The commander returned his ‘sun-banner’ and said: ‘Have some soup with us to-night. If you like, you can go back to your village and dig up the carrots after we have driven the enemy away. Take the flag along with you, and if you ever meet them, show it; but don’t tell where we are.’

At supper we all crowded round him. At first he was quite embarrassed; but when he saw that we were friendly he grew braver and soon began to eat voraciously. He emptied his bowl and even licked the bottom. After our meal he pressed a handful of mucus from his nose, rubbed it on his shoe, hiccuped, and, picking a bit of onion peel from his teeth, he threw it over the head of a comrade.

One afternoon, a few days later, Half a Cartload of Straw Short appeared in our courtyard again. As we gathered around the commander told us that the farmhand had joined our partisan brigade. At this good news we jumped with joy and loudly sang the ‘Partisan’s Song.’ But Half a Cartload of Straw Short only stood and grinned from beginning to end, puffing at his everlasting pipe.

At night I shared a bunk with Half a Cartload.

‘Why did you join our guerrilla troop?’ I asked him.

‘Why shouldn’t I?’ he solemnly replied. ‘Aren’t you all honest men?’

After pausing for a moment to suck his pipe, he added: ‘Unless we drive those devils out, we shall never be able to till our land again.’

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

I asked him with a smile: 'Where is your "sun flag"?''

'My woman is using it as a napkin for Little Puppy,' he answered casually, as if it were a matter of no account.

And he began to tell me about his family. I found that he was anxious to drive out the Japanese because he could no longer work on the land as in former, peaceful days. He had decided to send his wife and child to the rear with other refugees so that he might join our guerrillas. During our talk I noticed that his eyes were wandering about the room as if something was worrying him. I watched him silently, wondering what was wrong; but he continued to sit quietly smoking, now looking at me and then at the lamp. At last he became quite agitated, got up and went outside. In the courtyard he made water, coughed intentionally for a moment, and then returned. After knocking the ashes out of his pipe, he looked at me for awhile, put his pipe under the bedding, and lay down.

'What a peculiar fellow!' I said to myself. 'In spite of his rough appearance he is so gentle.'

Partisans generally like to sleep with a lamp burning when possible. Soon after Half a Cartload of Straw Short joined our brigade two strange things happened on two successive nights. One night a comrade who had got up in the night to make water, stumbled over another chap and broke his nose. Who could have blown out the lamp? The next night we were all awakened by a sound of firing. Sure that the enemy was near, we rushed about, grabbing any gun or sword we could find. When we discovered that it was a sentinel who had accidentally pulled the trigger of his gun, we were as mad as tigers and cursed each other, trying to solve who had put the lamp out.

The commander asked each of us who had extinguished the light, but nobody would own up to it. However I had a notion of the culprit's identity, and glanced at Half a Cartload stealthily. Noticing my eye on him, he suddenly turned pale and his knees began to tremble. The com-

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

mander walked over to him. 'Hell !' I said to myself, 'he's in for twenty strokes.' By now his legs were quaking so that he was almost falling down. But the commander unexpectedly smiled and asked him quite affably : 'Do you like the life with us ?'

'Of course I do, your lordship.' He took the pipe from his belt and offered it to the commander. 'Does your lordship like smoking a pipe ?'

At that we roared, and even the commander held his sides with laughter. But Half a Cartload of Straw Short kept his composure. He rubbed his pate, then scratched his chest. Nipping out a louse, he squeezed it and bit off its head.

Next day I took him aside and asked him in an undertone why he had blown out the light. He flushed and smiled. 'Because the oil is so dear, much dearer than before——' And, scratching his chest, he added : 'I am not used to sleeping with a lamp. Here, do you smoke a pipe ?'

By and by he grew accustomed to our community life. He became bolder and more lively. Sometimes he would pronounce on our common activities. He knew some bandit jargon, which he used now and then. For instance, he called a road 'a line,' a river 'a ribbon,' a cock 'a pointed beak,' the moon 'a stone,' and so forth. He criticized us like this :

'Many words are unlucky to use and should be avoided. When we were labourers there was no harm in using them ; but now, you know, we are playing at guns.'

We comrades would shun such 'bewitched' words, but we often embarrassed him by pointing out that revolutionaries should not use bandit jargon. Though he did not agree with us, he stopped insisting that certain words were unlucky. To justify himself he would only say humorously : 'Being a farmhand, I know nothing of such new fashions.' And then he would grow silent.

'Hullo,' I said to him one day, 'from now on you should call me "comrade."'

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

He shook his head and smiled. He condemned this suggestion, muttering : ' We natives of Shantung Province used to call each other " second brother," which is a far more respectful title.'

' But we are revolutionary troops, don't you understand ? ' I said.

' Ha, another new fashion ! ' he answered gloomily. ' I cannot understand——'

' The word " comrade " means " to work together," ' I explained to him. ' Just think, we share life in common, death in common, sufferings in common, battle in common, against the Japanese. Are we not " comrades " ? '

' Right, second brother ! ' he shouted joyfully. ' We have nothing to fear so long as we really do work together like " comrades." '

One evening, as we were marching out to battle, Half a Cartload of Straw Short touched me furtively on the shoulder and in a low voice murmured, ' Comrade ! ' Then he blushed and beamed like a child.

' Comrade ! ' He put his hand on my shoulder. ' Are we going to fight the Japanese devils ? '

I nodded to him and asked : ' Are you afraid ? '

' Not I,' said he. ' I have often fought against bandits.'

And we marched along, side by side. When I heard the rapid thumping of his heart I could not help laughing aloud.

' Now I've caught you ! ' I cried. ' You've just told me a lie. I can hear your heart hammering.'

He looked embarrassed. Twisting the pipe in his hand, he stammered : ' I am not afraid of the devils, never ! If I were, I would not be a man. When I used to fight bandits, at first I would feel my heart thumping inside me, but after a few minutes I would be quite calm again. " Second brother," a villager like me only fears the government officials.'

About a mile from the village held by the Japanese we halted in a graveyard. Two plucky comrades volunteered

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

to go ahead and spy out the land. A small detachment went round and lay an ambush behind the village, while the rest of us were to follow the advance guard. Suddenly Half a Cartload of Straw Short stepped right up to the commander and proposed himself.

‘Your lordship, I know the “line” well. Please allow me to enter the village first.’

We were amazed at his words. For a moment our commander looked at him incredulously: ‘Do you mean that you want to spy for us?’

‘Yes, your lordship, I have had a lot of experience in grappling with bandits before.’

Some of the men whispered in undertones behind the commander, saying that he was not fit for the job and would ruin the whole affair. But our leader spoke to Half a Cartload without any hesitation:

‘All right! But you must be cautious.’

Then he turned to me: ‘You keep him company; mind you look alert!’

Hand in hand we leapt out of the graveyard. We heard some discontented muttering behind us and then the commander:

‘Never mind. He is a careful fellow in spite of his stupid appearance.’

An arrow-shot from the village we lay on our bellies and looked and listened for the enemy. It was very quiet. Half a Cartload whispered in my ear:

‘Those damned Japanese have fallen asleep. Just wait a minute.’

He pulled off his shoes, tied them to his waist and walked towards the village, crouching low. I felt pretty anxious about him. I moved forward a few steps and hid behind a willow. With trigger cocked, I stared at the village. Nearly twenty minutes passed. No news from Half a Cartload! Growing more and more uneasy, I crept forward. Near the water-wheel shelter I saw a black shadow slowly moving

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

on the ground. A sound, and my heart began to beat like a galloping horse. Aiming my gun at the black figure, I called out in a loud voice :

‘ Who’s there ? ’

‘ Me ! Comrade ! ’ A familiar voice : ‘ Those blasted devils have all gone away. I looked for them in vain.’

I jumped out and asked anxiously : ‘ Did you search the whole village ? ’

‘ I’ve pried into every courtyard and every house ; but there wasn’t even a human hair to be found.’

‘ Why didn’t you cough and signal to me a bit sooner ? ’

‘ Well—well——’ Half a Cartload of Straw Short touched my shoulder, stammering : ‘ Because I still wanted a rope for my buffalo cow. Isn’t it a fine one ? When I was fighting bandits before, I would sometimes take things from others.’

And he showed me the rope with a gleeful smile.

‘ Put it down ! ’ I ordered. ‘ The commander will shoot you if he catches sight of that ! ’

Half a Cartload stared at me in disappointment, slowly unwinding the rope from about his waist. I gave a piercing whistle, and torches flashed suddenly. Our comrades rushed to the village from every direction.

‘ “ Second brother,” ’ Half a Cartload murmured in a frightened, tearful voice, ‘ look, I’ve taken off the rope——’

On the way back Half a Cartload of Straw Short followed close behind me. He was as silent as a child who has broken a cup and is awaiting punishment. Understanding the cause of his anxiety, I whispered a promise not to report the matter to our commander. He gently sighed and thrust his pipe at me. I asked him :

‘ Do you know why we shouldn’t take things from the people ? ’

‘ Because we are revolutionary fighters.’

Silent again for a moment, Half a Cartload of Straw Short suddenly asked me in a coaxing voice : ‘ Comrade, couldn’t we profit a wee bit by the revolution ? ’

‘ The revolution will do a lot of good for us as well as for

YAO HSÜEH-YIN

many others,' I said. ' If we succeed in driving the invaders out of our country, millions of people will be able to lead peaceful lives. Won't we also get some benefit from that ? '

" Of course, if we can live and work in peace, we shall naturally also——'

' Then we shall have a glorious time of it. And our sons and grandsons will be able to walk in the streets with heads erect.'

From that time on he became a vigorous and energetic partisan. He did not worry himself with thoughts of his wife and child. He began to learn to read ; each day he learned one character by heart, but when he had mastered about thirty he was badly wounded.

One moonlit night, twenty of us were ordered to destroy a railroad and wreck a train. We had no dynamite, nor had we very up-to-date weapons. Our plan was to demolish a section of the track and attack the military train when it was derailed.

Although we worked with great care, we could not help making some sound as we loosened the steel rivets. In the midnight quiet our noise carried far. A shot ! Then rapid firing !

' Lie down ! '

Just then we heard machine-guns. Bullets fell all around us, their smoke streaking through the air. Ten minutes of this and the firing ceased. A train was coming down the line.

Our detachment commander knew what to do. He bound six bombs together and stuck them under the rail.

' Run ! ' he ordered.

We rushed headlong to a graveyard close by and fell flat on our stomachs. Half a Cartload of Straw Short stood with his pipe in his mouth as if nothing had happened. Our officer pulled the pipe out of his mouth and hissed :

' Get down ! '

' Bullets only have eyes for bad men,' muttered Half a Cartload.

HALF A CARTLOAD OF STRAW SHORT

The military train roared down the track. Our bombs exploded like a blast of thunder. Dust, smoke, shrapnel, and the train crashed down the slope.

‘Hit!’ twenty voices shouted.

Again silence.

Then shouts of victory and commands from our officer. In the tumult I could hear a melancholy song :

‘When we depart from our metropolis . . .’

We rushed out of the graveyard towards the wrecked waggons. Immediately machine-guns opened fire. Half a Cartload was running ahead. He cried with pain and stumbled. We rushed on. Then the gallop of Japanese horses. We retreated. We found Half a Cartload firing like mad at the enemy.

‘Wounded badly? Can you still walk?’

‘In the leg,’ he said. ‘I don’t want to run away. I want to kill those devils.’

He struggled against it, but I got him on my back and ran with our men. Sometimes we both fell into a ditch. Firing, galloping horses, and the load on my back seemed nothing to me then. I only knew that I was running and that I had to run . . .

Another bullet had hit Half a Cartload of Straw Short during our retreat. He was unconscious. Back at our camp we revived him and found that it was only a surface wound. We put him on a stretcher to be moved to our rear hospital. He was very feverish and mumbled :

‘Da, da, da—my ox, my yellow ox—da, da, da . . .’



V. S. PRITCHETT

AUNT GERTRUDE

WE were in the front room of 97b Dorinda Gardens. It was a new house, with builders' putty, a tin of undercoating and a roll of wallpaper in the attic. A smell of paint and size was on the stairs, and a shop smell still in the carpets, the upholstery and the new furniture. Uncle owned the house, too, as a mortgagee, and that, Aunt said, was a new thing for him. There was the pride of being one of a regiment in this house, for it was one of several hundred, each with a small white balcony over the front door. The balcony had seduced Uncle. He said one could have breakfast on it 'like they did on the Riveera,' and in his imagination I am sure he did so, though there was room for only one person to stand on it and certainly no room for a table. A railway lay in a shallow green cutting at the end of the back garden and in front were two plots of waste land which had not yet been sold. From the bedroom, where I sometimes went in the afternoon when Aunt Gertrude was lying down, one could see a hoarding standing in the field, with the words Easipay Estates Ltd. Ideal Sites for Ideal Houses. The waste grass was spiked with thistles, lumpy with old horse manure, where yellow flies congregated. From Uncle we understood we were in Ideal Surroundings, but to us three boys the paddock was the snag of evil. Its wildness fascinated us and we loosened a paling in order to creep in and smoke our first cigarettes among its dungy stench, feeling that here was the native place of sin. Rusted kettles, a sour heap of old rags and the sight of a prowling dog which looked savage as it ran sniffing and watering in the hot climate of this enclosure, gave us the fright we longed for. One day as we looked through, Harold said, 'There's a man.' He was making

AUNT GERTRUDE

water in a corner. We moved off. The man had confirmed our belief in the horror of the place and it was good to cross the road and read the words on the hoarding again.

The house was a penny tram ride from my poor mother's dyeing and cleaning shop. I went there and did not recognize the place. The old shop front had gone, and the place was painted white. Instead of the dress which was always in the window in my mother's day, there was the figure of a man in evening dress on one side and a female model in a gown on the other. The inside of the shop was unrecognizable. The short flight of stairs had gone. There were now two oak counters and a small office enclosed in frosted glass. The open shelves we had had, had given place to new deep drawers. Since Uncle and Aunt did not live above the shop as my mother and I had done, the rooms had been let as a flat and showroom to a Mr. Reitling from Frankfurt, who imported lampshades, art pottery, handbags and also sold small tables and hassocks. Mr. Reitling was on close terms with Uncle and some of his goods furnished the shop. Uncle was on the verge of combining his business with Mr. Reitling. Leaving the shop one saw above the window the words Horace Smith, Dyers and Cleaners, Head Office. Then on the window: Branches, and a list of names. In fact these branches were merely the addresses of agencies, but Uncle had actually opened three within a radius of five miles.

I had been used to a frugal life, and decency was a word my mother often used. At Settleworth there had been a country frugality. Every day old Mrs. Smith used to put her Co-op. tickets in a tin on the kitchen mantelpiece. One felt the quiet mould of discipline, so pleasing to a child. But at Uncle Smith's house the climate was different. It was warmer. Even the sun, like some gold watch on a mayor's belly, seemed richer. There was a small passepartout picture in the hall which defined our lives. It was a picture of a letter box with a letter sticking out of it and on the letter in good writing was the address:

V. S. PRITCHETT

Messrs. Sell and Repent,
Prosperous Place,
The Earth.

‘Some sell and wish they hadn’t,’ said Uncle Smith, cocking a shrewd, pleased eyebrow at the picture.

‘Buy and repent you mean,’ said Aunt Gertrude, whose face used to puff into small lumps when she was contradicting. If Uncle Smith was the sun of the house, Aunt Gertrude was the critical and watery moon, ringed with omens of bad weather.

There was a canal at the end of Dorinda Gardens, the road went over it by a bridge and from the bridge one saw the slow worm of water pass under the girders of the railway. The days were warming and summer was blistering the new paint of the doors. One Sunday Aunt Gertrude said to Harold, her eldest son :

‘Where’s your dad ? What’s he doing ?’

‘S’upstairs, mum.’

‘He’s a long time,’ said Aunt Gertrude.

She was tied to her husband by fear. He was out all day and sometimes he would be away for two or three nights, and in these absences she sank back into an undercurrent of uneasiness. His absences, even in another room, had the same effect on her as the silences of a child. What calamity had occurred ? She was far from being one of those women who have the pose of treating their husbands as children. She was afraid of him and she knew it.

‘Pop up and see,’ said Aunt to Harold, but he did not want to go. He was writing in his notebook, copying a page from a book by Marie Corelli. He was making a book of quotations.

A time passed and then Uncle came downstairs. He was a quiet and secretive walker, a bubble blown along. He opened the kitchen door.

‘Gert,’ he said.

AUNT GERTRUDE

We gaped at him. He had dressed himself in a dark blue blazer with the initials H.B.S. worked on the pocket, white flannel trousers, white boots and on his head was a yachting cap. He kept his right hand in his blazer pocket.

He smiled shyly and modestly.

‘I thought I’d take you for a row on the canal.’

We all laughed until he blushed like a boy. He had to laugh too.

‘What’s the joke? I see no joke,’ he said grinning.

‘Where did you get that hat!’ called Harold.

‘No need to be vulgar,’ Uncle said, with a smirk. ‘We may not have a yacht, but we’re close to the water.’

Aunt stopped laughing and into her face came a glint of fear such as she always had whenever he did a new thing.

‘Look at your mother,’ said Uncle to Leslie. ‘Pretending she’s never been in a boat. We used to go out every Sunday when we were courting.’

‘I was a young limb,’ said Aunt Gertrude tenderly and dreamily; but while there was a glow in Uncle’s dreams, Aunt Gertrude’s had an edge to them and suggested that if anyone went back with her into her memories, they would get their hands scratched or their clothes torn.

We did not go rowing on the canal. There were no boats. But we walked down to the bridge, Uncle still in his regalia. We saw men fishing in the oil-green water and the thundery marble of summer clouds crested as white as cherry blossom and very still over their heads, as if the London sky were in a glass case. The men sat in the stillness smoking their pipes and watching their floats. Or leaving their rods, they went for short circular walks and grunted to one another. While we watched from the bridge one of the men whipped up his line. There was the squeal of rapid winding and at the end of the line was a fish like a slip of dancing tin. Uncle took us down to the towpath and the man showed us the fish.

‘That’s what we ought to do,’ said Uncle. ‘We’re on the water. We ought to catch our own fish. Imagine herrings straight out of the river.’

V. S. PRITCHETT

He said this to Aunt Gertrude when we got back. 'You don't get herrings in rivers,' she said tartly.

This genuinely astonished Uncle but he recovered.

'Imagine it!' he cried, giving her a smack on the bottom.

'Ah, come on, old girl,' he bullied. 'Cheer up. Imagine it!'

Our only visitor at Dorinda Gardens was my Grandma Carter. She came in her black bead bonnet, her red nose and the red-rimmed eyes showing like knife cuts through her black veil, and wearing a black cape of some shining material like the skin of a seal, the death-watch beetle of grief. She carried a string bag with her, for wherever she went she seemed always to travel with a few groceries, some sewing and a bottle of stout. There was the smell of the sharp grocer's about her, something compounded of tea, biscuits, bacon and pickles, and her tongue was the vinegar. Grief, one thinks, should purge and exalt the soul, but it had made her ugly, bad-tempered and given her also a morbid shuffling humility, a look of guilt and shame. She came every Wednesday to see us and she would suddenly appear, letting herself in by the back door and saying every time apologetically:

'I came round the back, Gert dear, because I see you done your front.' Then she pushed back her veil to the bridge of her nose, and turning slowly in a circle as a dog does before it lies down to sleep, she would give a sniff and put her string bag down on a chair. Her loneliness, her unhappiness and her snuffling made us afraid.

Aunt Gertrude was very guarded with her mother, for Gran had a tongue.

'Where d'you get that from?' Grandma Carter would exclaim at once, pointing perhaps at the coat and umbrella stand in the hall. She was very jealous of her daughter's new furniture.

'Horace bought it at Freebody's.'

'What's wrong with a hook and two nails?' Gran sniffed. 'Now I've come round to see what's happening to my boy's

AUNT GERTRUDE

money.' I, of course, was her boy; but so many she had loved had repaid her treacherously by dying that she was distant and suspicious and erratic in the show of affection to me. She had had a scare when she thought she might be landed with me when my mother died. Gran gave me a whiskered kiss which smelled of sugar bags, and tears came off her face on to mine. She was small but there was something muscular in her grip when she hugged me and she would tell Aunt of the dozens of times when 'the poor lamb' (myself) had shown that I regarded her as a second mother—a delusion, for Gran terrified me. Gran's life was filled with guilt towards the living, whom she looked at slyly, and her tears were not from a vessel that has been broken, but were to conceal this guilt. She was guilty because she forgot and neglected them in her absorption with the dead.

What a difference there was between the damp Carters and the dry Smiths.

When they had settled down and Grandma Carter had asked perfunctorily after her son-in-law with a 'How's Smith?' Aunt Gertrude asked after Gran's lodgers. They were never called lodgers.

'How is . . . er . . . ' Aunt said, not finishing the sentence and looking up at the silk shade over the gas bracket in the middle of the room.

'Studying for his . . . ' Gran replied nodding with a genteel expression. The word 'examinations' suggested a rare, upper atmosphere which it did not become her to investigate or even mention.

After this Aunt and Gran got down to the dead. The two women raised them and wept. Poor Flo, how she had suffered; my father's cough, that horse which had kicked my grandfather—the horse had died too, for they had had it shot—then Harry being taken and the brightness of my mother, her last words—some dispute about them—and then poor Great Aunt Emily, her last years darkened, and her brother Wilf, the deaf fishmonger. Having exhausted the human dead, unwrapping the cerements of memory and gazing

V. S. PRITCHETT

at the closed faces, Aunt and Gran would feel hungry, as if death had been their appetizer, and would get out the beet-root, the vinegar and the mutton bone. Aunt called from the kitchen in a high giggling voice.

‘Gran! Gran!’

‘Yes, dear?’

‘I was thinking of Aunt Emily’s dog Rover.’ And Aunt went off into a shriek of laughter. ‘How it went away that night, do you remember? And they found it two days later drowned in the canal!’

Aunt came in holding the mutton bone in her hand and waving it as she laughed and they both laughed and laughed till they had to sit down.

‘Don’t be so reel, Ma,’ said Aunt Gertrude. ‘It’s wicked to laugh. She loved that dog. Oh, don’t, I’ll die. . . .’

‘Emily was a fool about that dog,’ said Gran Carter to steady their laughter.

But Aunt was off now, off being Gran’s word for it. She remembered other dogs, Wilf’s jackdaw, Flo’s goldfish, my mother’s canary which Aunt Gertrude’s cat had got when they were young—for there was a jealousy between the sisters and Aunt was always guilty about having left the cage door open—human beings had given place to the animals and the birds. And then Aunt’s face and Gran’s straightened and the two women ended with the horse which had given Gran’s husband the fatal kick.

‘I’ll never forget the day poor Jessie was shot.’ The purgation was complete, Gran started to admire all the new furniture now and said, ‘Smith’s paid for it, I hope,’ and a defiance came into Aunt Gertrude’s salty green eyes and she said, ‘Yes, he has.’ And then Gran went. She took a roll of wallpaper that day to paper her closet. She was an active woman and a natural picker up of trifles by the way.

Women are the terrors, the sergeant majors of childhood. Their hard quick fingers pull you at the neck, get at your ears, strain at buttons, one moment they are cuffing, the

AUNT GERTRUDE

next they are hugging. Their moods last about a quarter of an hour. It's easy to scare them, simple to delude them . . . Not all women. My mother was not like this. Our shop must have put some order into her femininity. But Aunt Gertrude had the disorder of a story. When she wasn't weeping, she was laughing, swaying up and down and covering her face with her hands, or she was in a temper, or she was sulking. She sulked when she was tired of us, especially when Uncle was away for a day or two, waiting for him to come home. She was not a beautiful woman, but the nearer the time of his return came, her restless face calmed in a sulk which was a kind of beauty. She set her yellow hair under a net until it was as firm as a scone, her underlip drooped and the pupils of her grey eyes turned darker, almost blue. She put on her best dress and watered a small fern in the middle of the table and sat in the front room without moving. It made her rather impressive that in the middle of the afternoon she had had a bath and we had to keep away from her so as not to spoil her clothes. She was one of those fair freckled women who sweat easily and after a bath the smell, half of soap, and half hay-like of her skin, put an excitement into the air, as if we were walking in a summer field. Harold, her son, was in love with her at these times, and spoke very piously and devotedly and kept us away from her. He wanted her to stay like this and did not want his father to return. But she was not in love with her son.

'Why don't you behave yourself like this all the time?' she said sarcastically to him. Harold had the sanctimoniousness of a once-spoiled and now easily envious eldest child. She preferred Leslie, the younger boy, at this moment because he too was longing for Uncle to come back and stood for hours at the window. The time when she was in love with Harold was just after Uncle had gone away; but Harold was excited by freedom then and did not want her.

Aunt Gertrude was like a book of stories to me. When there were holidays I would leave the boys who were playing in the garden or the kitchen, pretending to them I was going

V. S. PRITCHETT

to the lavatory. I would go upstairs and try to get into Aunt Gertrude's bedroom where she used to lie down in the afternoon.

'Who's that? Stop fiddling at the door. What do you want?'

I got into the habit of going there and standing at the window, watching the road and telling her what was happening. A wide road, sandy; the hoarding opposite; a dog in the paddock; a pile of new bricks in the lot which had been sold.

'There goes the lady with the dog.'

Once or twice Aunt got off the bed when I said this. She lay on the bed in a pair of grey bloomers and a loose vest with her thick hair down over her shoulders so that her face seemed to be looking out of the flap of a hairy tent, like a savage's. She got off the bed and kicked the chamber pot and peeped through the curtains. The tall, grey-haired woman with the dog fascinated my aunt.

'There she goes,' she repeated to herself. 'Look at her. And the dog.' It was a fox terrier.

'She's a lady,' Aunt Gertrude said in a dreamy voice, coming away and pushing the chamber pot under the bed in a refined way. 'She spoke to me in the grocer's. Her little dog got its lead all twisted up round me and she said,'—here Aunt imitated the woman's accent—'“Ooh, Ai'm soo sorr-eh.” “Oh noo reely, it's quite all right,” I said. I could see she was a lady. “Ooh but mai leetle dawg is being ai nuis-ance. Come heah, Tiny.” And she smiled. “Ooh don't mention it,” I said.'

Now she was out of bed, Aunt sat at her dressing table. Like all the other furniture it was new; the price of the dressing table was marked in blue chalk on the back of the mirror. I looked at her. She had slim arms and small shoulders and the skin, except at the armpits where it was the colour of dry yellow grass, was very white. She told me to have another look at the window and, when I obeyed, with a furtive blush, she took her clothes off and put on the new ones in a hurry in case I should see. I turned to watch her brush her straight thin hair.

AUNT GERTRUDE

One afternoon she was doing her hair like this when an accident happened, something which dominated her thoughts for months afterwards. She was holding her hand-mirror in one hand and talking to herself in it while she did her hair at the back.

‘Is it right at the back? There’s another bit. Let’s put a pin in it. Here,’ she said, handing me a hairpin over her shoulder, ‘put it in, do you see? No, not there. That bit. Oh come on, give it to me.’

She had quick, nervy hands, and she put out her hand for the pin and placed the mirror on the table.

‘Here it is,’ I said. She was trying to get the pin from me without looking round and then she turned round with one of her sudden movements. Her elbow caught the mirror and it fell to the floor.

Aunt Gertrude’s face changed.

‘Don’t touch it,’ she said.

I stood back, startled by the crash. She stared down at the mirror which was lying on its face. Her manner frightened me.

‘It’s gone,’ she exclaimed. ‘I heard it go.’ Her face went very red and her cheeks became lumpy as she bent down and picked up the mirror. The glass had cracked across the face.

‘Oh, I wish I hadn’t done that,’ she said, gazing at the crack.

It was nothing for Aunt to smash things, tear things, drop things. She was a careless woman. And she did not mind except to say to the boys: ‘Don’t tell your father.’ But as she held the mirror, she looked with helpless appeal at it, blown out with unbelief.

‘That’s seven years’ bad luck to me,’ she said.

‘Don’t be silly,’ I said.

‘You see. I know it,’ she said. ‘I broke one before my wedding day. And for seven years your uncle had nothing but trouble.’

Then she stood up and got in a temper with me and everything, telling me to pick up her clothes and fold them

V. S. PRITCHETT

straight and muttering such things as: 'Where's your uncle? Brush your hair before he comes. Three late nights with that Reitling. Look at my hair—it's coming down again.'

And suddenly she pulled half her hair down, picked up the cracked mirror and started again angrily. Half her face was swollen and the other half looked fierce, distraught and mad as she picked up lengths of hair and pulled them into place on top.

'Trouble the whole time. Never in the same job five minutes,' she spat at the mirror. 'That's your uncle. What's he doing now?'

She had hairpins in her teeth and pulled one out after every sentence.

'Pay as you go,' she said. And out came a hairpin.

'That's how us girls were brought up. If you haven't got it, don't spend it.' Another pin.

'It's robbery. They say I don't understand these things, but right's right.' Another pin.

Aunt began to talk to invisible presences in the room.

'If your precious son's so perfect why did I have to come up here with a babe in arms begging for bread and say "Thank you" for every mouthful? "Eh," she says, "There's some have no business to get married and may be some *has* to get married." Vernon,' she swung round to me, taking out the remaining pins and holding them wildly. 'I could have skinned the old bitch. "You mind what you're saying," I said. "A better-living lot of girls you won't find. Gran had her troubles as we all know, but us girls were straight."'

The temper went and she sulked dreamily into the mirror.

'It's a good thing he met a straight girl like me,' she said quietly, 'a young country boy like that, he might have had someone who would have got hold of him. There was one or two in the shop. But I could stick up for myself. It was my hair,' she said, lifting up the final strand and curling it round her finger, 'he fell in love with, your poor mother could sit on hers.'

'Vernon,' she said, turning round again. 'He had the

AUNT GERTRUDE

cleanest hands I've ever seen on a man. I'll never forget in all my natural how clean his hands were. That was the first thing I noticed. Your dear dad used to say Horace Smith's the only man in this shop that washes.'

'He got that from old Mrs. Smith, of course. She scrubbed Horace and Mildred when they were kids till they were as clean as her kitchen. Too clean, if you ask me. But, of course, I didn't go out with him for the asking. I led him on. I didn't half make him jealous. There he was in his spats—a regular K-nut, shop-walker, see—of course, he would have everything just so, your uncle!—and he says, "Buttons forward, Miss Carter," I can see him now. "Gloves here, not buttons, caught you bending," I said. The cheek of me when you come to think of it. I was terrible.' Aunt's eyes flashed green as the sea.

'Girl-like,' she said dreamily. And then she saw the crack in the mirror and tears came into her eyes, large tears like the pearl buttons in her blouse. To me they were not like the tears I had seen before, for her common tears were hardly personal, but a general oblation to the unexplainable coming and going of woe in the world.

LOUIS MACNEICE

TWO POEMS

STYLITE

THE saint on the pillar stands,
The pillar is alone,
He has stood so long
That he himself is stone ;
Only his eyes
Range across the sand
Where no one ever comes
And the world is banned.

Then his eyes close,
He stands in his sleep,
Round his neck there comes
The conscience of a rope,
And the hangman counting
Counting to ten—
At nine he finds
He has eyes again.

The saint on the pillar stands,
The pillars are two,
A young man opposite
Stands in the blue,
A white Greek god,
Confident, with curled
Hair above the groin
And his eyes on the world.

TWO POEMS

CASUALTY OF WAR (NEW YORK)

Greenwich time is five hours on ;
The iron hawks have been and gone.

Gomorrhah with its baubles burnt up easy, a Christmas tree
without any Christ, a tree that had served its purpose.

His birthplace was a Wiltshire town
Taking a nap by a chalk down.

The white horse that only exists at a distance is still lifting
his right forefoot. The sponges within the flint have long
been powder.

This young man, they used to say,
Would with luck go a long way.

Luck is the blossom of limes and pears blowing and snowing,
luck is the counting of petals, reflection of wings, a red
ball sidling over an enormous plain to a pocket that
is not there. But as well as luck there is Lethe, a broad
river where careers end.

At twenty-three he had not found
The answer in the frozen ground.

For life, so wide at the base, was a granite ascent—at the
top the priest with the knife. A funny thing that 10 p.m.
there is 3 a.m. here. In the five hours that America
would never know the priest put back his sleeve.

Long before we went to bed
He was asleep and he was dead.

There were neither drums nor thunder, only the chalk
squeaked on the blackboard. One more flake in a field
of snow and between black margins and equals nought.
A pressed flower in a book that nobody will open again.

WALTER ALLEN

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

'THE pink decade' the nineteen-thirties have recently been christened, but in spite of the sneer, for any writer of the 'thirties to have been non-political, to have aimed at pure art, is in a way itself suspect ; and Henry Green is very possibly the only pure artist among the novelists of the 'thirties. His second novel, *Living*, pre-dated Auden's first book of verse by a year, and reading it when it appeared one was excited by it in much the same way as one was by Auden, one cannot say wrongly because it was impossible to foresee his next novel, *Party Going*, written between 1931 and 1938. The subject-matter of *Living* gave him, as it were, honorary membership of a movement in writing to which he never truly belonged ; but in 1929 it was the subject-matter, life among Birmingham foundry workers, that fascinated. In the novelty of the material, while one admired the style one saw it as little more than eccentricity, an attempt to express new subject-matter in a new way ; for already emphasis had passed from technique to content. But with the publication of *Party Going* one could no longer see it in that way ; it became clear that Green stood apart from what had become the contemporary movement, that he was an artist in an older sense, in the way that Flaubert and George Moore and Joyce were artists, men whose main preoccupation was with style. For such writers material was of course not unimportant : Flaubert has for so long been summed up in the single sweeping phrase *le mot juste* that it is necessary to remember that *Bovary* and *l'Éducation Sentimentale* are magnificent social documents just as *Ulysses* is an excellent vade mecum to Dublin. But for the pure artist, with his preoccupation with methods of expression, subject

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

is of secondary importance in that he sees it as existing mainly as the vehicle for a method of expression ; and as Flaubert followed up the study of provincial life that is *Bovary* with the archaeological reconstruction of *Salamambo*, so Green could write first a novel of working-class life in Birmingham and then a novel about wealthy irresponsibles which, considered in terms of content alone, should be trivial, and is anything but that.

It is anything but that because of its style. In *Pack My Bag*, Green has stated his idea of the function of prose :

‘ Prose is not to be read aloud but to oneself at night, and it is not quick as poetry, but rather a gathering web of insinuations which go further than names however shared can ever go. Prose should be a long intimacy between strangers with no direct appeal to what both may have known. It should slowly appeal to feelings unexpressed, it should in the end draw tears out of the stone.’

That is obviously no description of prose as it is written by most of the best contemporary writers, by Isherwood and Orwell and Graham Greene. Prose has become colloquial and direct, has returned to Dryden and Defoe and Swift. We no longer object, with Johnson, that the ‘ rogues never hazard a metaphor ’ ; but Green hazards them continually, and to such an extent has the plain style conquered that, reading the Sunday reviewers, you might be pardoned for inferring that *Party Going* was the work of an illiterate. Beneath the apparent naivety, the occasional superficial resemblance to the Stein stutter, his prose is a prose carefully wrought, highly sophisticated and highly mannered, the most distinctive prose in contemporary writing. Whereas the basis of most modern prose is the simple sentence (to take an extreme instance, there is only one relative clause in Halward’s story *Arch Anderson*), each paragraph of Green’s, in his latest development, is planned and built up as carefully as the octave of a sonnet. Take the following, from *Pack My Bag* :

WALTER ALLEN

‘ Later, when the accident I have described disrupted me, I felt, and it is hard to explain, as though the feelings I thought I ought to have were hunting me. I was as much alone as any hunted fox. Only as my feelings turned and doubled in their tracks to the loud blasts of news each cable brought, as conscience the huntsman cast my feelings forward and then back until the fox I was was caught, bowled over at last into genuine surrender, there was something desperate in the noise, the howling at my heels. At this distance the noise of the pack is stilled, their music as it is called comes from over the hill, the huntsman, now an older man, blows his horn gently, and the note, now so distant it is no louder than a breath to bring forgotten embers to a glow, is a shame remembered, a run across familiar country.’

Green is, in fact, to use Connolly’s word, a Mandarin ; of a new kind certainly, but none the less a Mandarin.

Or there is another way in which Green’s distance from his contemporaries may be measured. Compare him, for instance, with Calder-Marshall, a writer of much the same social class and education, and one of the leading theorists of contemporary fiction as well as a characteristic practitioner. His style, more violent than Isherwood’s and Orwell’s, since it is based on Joyce and the shock-tactics of Wyndham Lewis, is akin to theirs in that it aims at direct expression. His progress, one may say, has been from psycho-analysis to social realism, from Freud to Marx ; so that his books are the record of a personal development which has also been the typical development of a generation. His work, then, forms a continuum. Green’s does not in any such way ; with the exception of his first novel, *Blindness*, written while he was still at school, it is not at all the record of a personal development. He is aloof from his material in a way that Calder-Marshall is not ; and he is untouched, as a writer, by contemporary ideas whether political or psychological. Lawrence defines the novel

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

somewhere as a 'thought-adventure,' and for the majority of writers this is true. 'How can I know what I think till I see what I say?' sums up the practice of most of us. But Green—and this is another sign of the pure artist—appears to be quite apart from his work, outside it; it is not a series of disguised chapters of autobiography.

His prose is, I think, a poetic prose. It was so conventionally in *Blindness*, a first novel of no more than average promise, though the theme, a literary and Etonian adolescent going blind and adjusting himself to blindness, is ambitious. There, the writing, the descriptions of nature in which the book abounds, are Georgian: Rupert Brooke is just round the corner and John Drinkwater may drop in at any moment. But after Eton and Oxford Green went to work in his Birmingham foundry. He started his novelist's career with one great advantage over his middle-class contemporaries: as the boss's son, with an inherited interest in a foundry, he could move, as it were, up and down the social scale as he pleased. In order to write about working-class life, as in *The Nowaks*, Isherwood had to go to Berlin; but Green could go to Birmingham. He had, in other words, some of the advantages of the Americans: he did not have to depend upon the party cell for his contacts with another class; he had the entrée into a different level of society.

In his Bordesley foundry he worked on the floor for some months, writing *Living* in his spare time. The difference between *Blindness* and *Living* is as startling as the difference between Oxford and the Coventry Road must have been to the author. The title of the book is itself defiant, as though Green had discovered life for the first time. No working-class writer, I think, could have written the book; the author's delighted sense of novelty is carried over to the reader, and it is significant that it has had no apparent influence on working-class writers apart from James Hanley, who owes something to its style in his *Stoker Bush*. The theme is now a familiar one: the displacement of labour by reorganization and the infatuation of a girl who wants marriage and

WALTER ALLEN

children before anything else with a young man who finally, and comically, deserts her. But it remains, after twelve years, the best novel of factory life written by an Englishman. It is a remarkable tour-de-force : as a Birmingham man, who spoke with the local accent for the first fifteen years of my life, I can vouch for the accuracy of the dialogue and scene, and as an employee at a foundry I know that the description of life there and of foundry technique is as correct.

But *Living* is not, as one interpreted it when it first came out, primarily a realistic novel. Green escapes, sometimes through a poetry of incident, sometimes through a daring arrangement of words which may be called poetic, often through both at once, the bounds of narrow realism that have confined most writers of working-class life in this country and trembles on the verge of symbolism. As an example of what I mean by poetry of incident the following passage may be quoted :

‘ Then, one morning in iron foundry, Arthur Jones began singing. He did not often sing. When he began the men looked up from work and at each other and stayed quiet. In machine shop, which was next iron foundry, they said it was Arthur singing and stayed quiet also. He sang all morning.

‘ He was Welsh and sang in Welsh. His voice had a great soft yell in it. It rose and rose then fell again and, when the crane was quiet for a moment, then his voice came out from behind noise of the crane in passionate singing. Soon each one in this factory heard that Arthur had begun and, if he had 2 moments, came by iron foundry shop to listen. So all through that morning, as he went on, was a little group of men standing by door in the machine shop, always different men. His singing made them all sad. Everything in iron foundries is black with the burnt sand, and here was his silver voice yelling like bells. The black grimed men bent over their black boxes. . . .

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

‘Every one looked forward to Arthur’s singing, each one was glad when he sang, only, this morning, Jim Dale had bitterness inside him like girders, and when Arthur began singing his music was like acid to that man and it was like that girder was being melted and bitterness and anger decrystallized, up rising up in him till he was full and would have broken out—when he put on coat and walked off and went into town and drank. . . .

‘Still Arthur sang and it might be months before he sang again. And no one else sang that day, but all listened to his singing. That night son had been born to him.’

That is a good sample of Green’s style in *Living* : bare, repetitive, harsh, angular, sometimes deliberately clumsy, an admirable medium for the expression of the blackness and din of a foundry. Green tells us in *Pack My Bag* that in the Oxford English School he failed to learn Anglo-Saxon ; but whether by design or not, the prose of *Living* is an Anglo-Saxon prose, many of its devices, the omission of the definite article, the emphatic ‘that,’ are Anglo-Saxon devices, and one suspects that Sweet’s *Old English Reader* had a greater influence on Green than he knew.

As an example of the tendency towards symbolism I would quote the way in which the background of drab streets and public parks is dominated by the flights of homing pigeons, as though Green himself, writing at the window of an upper room, were endlessly fascinated by their flight. Any conscientious realist might have put in the pigeons as part of his detail. But Green makes much more out of them than this. They recur again and again throughout the book, sometimes in simple description, sometimes as images for the working of the characters’ minds. They are symbolic at once of escape, of the life beyond the labyrinths of brick, and of attachment to home and the familiar scene. This use of something approaching symbolism gives *Living* a unity

WALTER ALLEN

underlying its formal structure ; and such passages remain in the mind in ' a gathering web of insinuations.'

In *Party Going*, as the subject-matter lessens in importance—it is the world of Evelyn Waugh, with a difference—so the style becomes more rotund and involved and the symbolism deepens. A party of what would once have been called bright young people are going to France as the guests of an absurdly rich young man ; they meet at the station, fog holds up the train, and they are marooned in the upper rooms of the station hotel, while the hordes of workers waiting for trains below, singing community songs, thicken until they threaten to swamp the hotel itself. What Hollywood calls the ' plot-line ' is as simple as that. ' No one with a sensitive intelligence,' John Lehmann has said, ' can read it without feeling that there is an under-pattern of symbolism ; a parable, let us say, of the predicament in which the English ruling classes found themselves at the worst of the crisis between 1929 and 1931.' But parable, it seems to me, implying as it does a moral tag, a lesson to be learnt, is precisely what the book is not ; and the symbolism is wider and deeper than Lehmann's words might suggest. Symbolism, concrete in its imagery, stirs the mind with the richness of its implications, and if it can be translated into definite terms, into a prose meaning, is symbolism no longer. A case in point is the incident—its repercussions run through the book—of the spinster aunt at whose feet a dead pigeon tumbles in the station entrance ; she picks it up, takes it to the ladies' lavatory and washes it, and makes it up into a brown paper parcel. The discovery disturbs the party, as it disturbs the reader ; the incident is funny, but it is more than that, and its meaning cannot be paraphrased. To account for its effect one is forced back, as Forster was when discussing the nature of Lawrence's genius in *Aspects of the Novel*, on some such word as prophetic.

Party Going is a comic novel ; it can rest, I believe, on the same shelf as the best of Firbank. But it is on its symbolism that I have preferred to concentrate, since it seems to me,

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

as a symbolic novel, so much more successful than anything the English disciples of Kafka have written. The difference between it and Upward's *Journey to the Border*, for instance, seems to me the difference between symbolism and allegory. *Journey to the Border* can be paraphrased, it is 'about' something, a moral can be extracted as you can extract no moral from Kafka: in the little streets down by the docks there is a small newsagent's where you can buy the *Daily Worker*. Upward's is one of the most exciting novels produced during the last decade; its intellectual content is much richer than anything of Green's; yet in the end the book fails, the excitement fizzles out, the explanations begin, the reader is let down. The moral is not commensurate with the excitement that has been generated in the imagination. More than any book of the decade it shows the dangers that beset the imaginative writer who is also a political writer. *Party Going* may be much less worthy in a political sense, and it is certainly less ambitious, but it succeeds as Upward's does not, and is original in that it derives from the author alone. You may explain the theme in John Lehmann's terms; you may see it as an exposure of futility and as a satire on people with wealth but without responsibility; or you may read it simply as a comic novel. It is all these, and something more; obstinately itself and irreducible to a single moral. Again Green's own phrase, 'a gathering web of insinuations,' best describes its effect.

Green's most recent book, *Pack My Bag*, is a slighter work than the two which preceded it, though the style is richer and more consciously poetic. It is right, I think, to see it as a substitute for a novel; it is a crisis book written in 1938 and 1939. Green calls it a 'self-portrait,' and though it seems to me a book that nobody interested in modern writing must miss, one reads it primarily for the light it throws on Green as an artist. The content is ordinary enough: other people have described expensive prep schools and the pleasures and trials of hunting and fishing; and Eton is now a familiar scene. But, like the novels, it is

WALTER ALLEN

an original book. Autobiographies of childhood and adolescence, whether avowedly autobiographical or ostensibly fiction, fall generally into two kinds. There is the report on experience, the intellectual, analytical, almost clinical study, like *Lions and Shadows*, or Connolly's *A Georgian Boyhood*, in which the author attempts to answer the question, 'How did I come to be the man I am?' ; and there is the attempt to recreate the past in itself, without reference to the author's present state, as in Spender's *The Backward Son*. In either case the writer looks as far as possible at himself as though he were somebody else. Green makes no such attempt. 'It is wrong,' he writes, 'to try to recreate days that are gone. All one can do is search them out and put them down as close as possible to what they now seem.'

The result is a highly subjective, highly personal book. His Eton days cover, for instance, much the same period as *A Georgian Boyhood*, which may almost be read as a gloss on *Blindness* and *Pack My Bag*, but the pictures of Eton are so different as to be pictures of worlds that appear to have nothing in common. It is significant that Eton is not even given its name. The book portrays one isolated human being as child, schoolboy and undergraduate, and so strong is the sense of isolation that one feels the author's withdrawal to be deliberate. There is no trace of any concern for ideas, any preoccupation with society and the individual's relation to it. There is instead acceptance of the *status quo*, of Oxford, of the world of business, of the personal isolation that is the individual's lot under the reign of Economic Man.

It is this lack of concern for ideas, this lack of interest in the world as it exists outside the small world of the personal, that makes *Pack My Bag* ultimately unsatisfying. In many ways Green appears in his self-portrait as passive as any Hemingway character. Instead of ideas, we are given the expression of a death-wish. A curiously nostalgic, elegiac note runs through the book, a mourning for lost integrity. 'One is always caught up,' he comments on his behaviour during the General Strike, 'one inevitably has to take a

AN ARTIST OF THE THIRTIES

hand, but what I miss now is the reluctance I had then. It is not that one was ever afraid to die. One may resent being killed, but most of us are quite ready. What is despairing in my case is that I should acquiesce, in the old days I should never have done so, and that is my farewell to youth in this absolute bewilderment of July 1939, that I should be so little unwilling to fight and yet likely enough to die by fighting for something which, as I am now, for the life of me I cannot understand.'

That is courageous, but all the same I think one can fairly protest that it is not good enough. The writers of the movement most typical of the 'thirties, those associated with NEW WRITING, may have reacted in various ways towards the war, may have lost their unity of the days before the war, but at least they know where they stand, whether they are now socialists of the Orwell-Strachey kind, orthodox communists, or pacifists ; they have not been taken by surprise, they cannot say 'For the life of me I cannot understand.' To be able to say this, in July 1939 of all times, is an index of the dangers that confront the pure artist writing in a political age.

From *Pack My Bag* it is plain that Green accepted the period between the two wars as a *status quo*. Writing mainly in the 'thirties, he seems to me to belong spiritually to the generation that preceded it. One thought of Green in terms of Auden and Spender and Isherwood because he is of their generation ; but in point of fact, his practice has run directly counter to the tendencies of his age. It has justified itself in three very original books, two of which, *Living* and *Party Going*, are in their respective ways as important as anything published in the decade. It is precisely because he has run counter to the age, and justified himself while doing so, that it has seemed worth while to devote some space to a consideration of his work and his position as a writer, particularly now that what one thought were settled ideas of writing and the writer's job are once again in the melting pot.

DATE OF ISSUE

This book must be returned
within 3, 7, 14 days of its issue. A
fine of ONE ANNA per day will
be charged if the book is overdue.

--	--

